



OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA™
ROLEPLAYING GAME



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For additional information, visit the Native Land website and app at <https://native-land.ca/>



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INTRODUCTION

Appalachia. Say her name softly and with respect, if you speak it at all.

The bones of our mother are sacred. They have been drenched with the sweat of toil and the blood of sacrifice. The place you stand now is an altar built on the bones of those who went digging for something darker than shadows just to put food on the table.

If you were born in these mountains, family, you know what sings beneath them. You have felt it pull on your heartstrings and tug at your innards anytime you think of moving away. If you stay, then you have been seduced by that siren's serenade as surely as if she stood at your shoulder and crooned in your ear. You listen to her as she whispers that home is where the heart is, while she holds yours clutched, bleeding, in her talons. The road that leads out of this place—all asphalt and yellow lines paved and maintained by the county—can only bear you to damnation, but the road that carries you home? Blessed be that well-worn path, that holy back road, that marriage of gravel and cold earth that calls you back again and again, whether you mean it to or not.

If you have come here from outside, then you have already answered her call: forsaking your flat lands and high-falutin' cities, burrowing into her bosom like an invasive species. You were charmed by her hospitality, her sweet tea, and all the blessings of your poor little heart. You were captivated by the lush green of her rolling hills, the dappled sunlight beneath the canopy of her trees, the temptation to know what lies at the end of every shaded path that twists into the heart of these hollers. Now you stand on the precipice of a void you cannot comprehend. You poor pilgrims are unprepared for the journey into our home, but we assure you, she is more than prepared for you.

You find yourself deep within the heart of a place of mixed blessings and assorted curses. This sprawling chain of mining towns, hollers, and low-rolling mountains once hummed with the promise of becoming something more, a promise made and broken time and time again. There are good hearts in Appalachia, broken and poisoned by an industry that can no longer provide for them. There is kindness and community and tradition found here, to be certain. Appalachia is the kind of place where your neighbors band together to bring casseroles and soup beans and biscuits and pies to your house on a rotating schedule if they hear you've been sick or lost a loved one. But in communities knit so tight, sometimes it can be hard to catch your breath. Sometimes the weight of tradition can feel like an anchor chained around your neck. Sometimes holding folks close means you have to live with the stench of all their dirty laundry.

You see, family, Appalachia has her secrets. Beneath the surface of polite smiles and Sunday suppers beats a heart of ever-flowing darkness.

Welcome home.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is 'Steve Shell' and the second is 'Cam Collins'. They are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Shell & Cam Collins

Part I: WHERE THE SHADOWS STIR



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Chapter 1:

WELCOME TO THESE HILLS AND HOLLERS

To dip into the Old Gods of
Appalachia podcast, visit
www.olgodsappalachia.com

The Old Gods of
Appalachia Roleplaying
Game is a horror game,
and as such, is full of
things that might disturb
your dreams, follow in
your footsteps, and haunt
your waking hours. Please
use appropriate consent
tools (see page 14) and
exercise necessary caution
when playing this game.

The Inner Dark, page 188
Hollow Men, page 362



Welcome, family, to a game and a place like no other. The Old Gods of Appalachia Roleplaying Game is set in an alternate Appalachia, a place filled with creatures of the Green, the Inner Dark, and things even more ancient. It's based on the Old Gods of Appalachia podcast, a captivating eldritch horror anthology created by Steve Shell and Cam Collins.

The Old Gods of Appalachia Roleplaying Game is:

- An eldritch horror game set in an alternate early 1900s Appalachia, one filled with beings of immeasurable darkness and incomprehensible desires.
- A collective tale of hardship, horror, hope, and heart, where every choice requires a sacrifice and your word is (or should be) your bond.
- An opportunity to put aside existing stereotypes and explore the land, culture, heritage, and people of Appalachia in all their complexities, complications, and beauty.

This game and its setting are based on the podcast Old Gods of Appalachia. We've worked closely with the creators of the podcast to remain true to the stories, setting, and sensibility of the world, but some changes are always necessary to successfully turn one type of story-based medium into another. In order to create a more playable game, we have chosen to alter some elements so that they no longer exactly match the podcast. This was done purposefully to benefit the game and is not designed in any way to alter the canon of the podcast itself.

WHAT DO YOU DO IN THIS GAME?

In the Old Gods of Appalachia (OGO A) roleplaying game, you play characters who try to protect what matters to them, be that family, community, a place, or something else, all while trying to know the unknowable.

You might play a local miner who delved too deep into the earth and uncovered something that now stalks your dreaming hours—and your waking ones. Perhaps you're a charismatic preacher who stands in a pulpit extolling the virtuous life, trying your best to atone for the dark bargain you made long ago. Or maybe you're an outsider, a reporter come to debunk a tale of monsters from the mountains, only to learn that everything you heard isn't just true—it's yours now, a story that literally lives inside your blood and bones.

Working with the other players, you might try to protect your community against the ravenous creatures of the Inner Dark, uncover the plots of the sinister Hollow Men, or unearth a beast that's long been dreaming in the dark. And (hopefully) you'll accomplish all this through might, skills, and magic—which could come in the form of spirit voices, music, knowledge, herbal concoctions, hand-carved walking sticks, dark bargains, and more.

WHAT IF YOU'VE NEVER LISTENED TO THE PODCAST?

No worries. For one, you can have a listen for free anywhere you listen to podcasts. There are lots of episodes to choose from, and they're a great opportunity to hear the voices and cadence of storytelling from the region.

You don't have to listen to the podcast to play the game, but it can really help set the tone of the experience and give you additional ideas beyond the scope of this book. We recommend that you listen to the episodes in release order as, while the show is technically an anthology, it's more anthology-style because the episodes connect in a meta-plot.

WHAT IF YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT APPALACHIA?

Not to worry—we've got you covered. The first thing to know is how to pronounce it—it's "apple atcha," like "throwing an apple atcha." Unless, of course, your character's an outsider, in which case their mispronunciation will give them away right quick.

Beyond that, this book explains what life was like for folks in the Central Appalachian region in the early 1900s (and beyond), details the important places and structures of the region, offers up cultural insights and touchstones, details the kinds of **clothing and items** that people used and wore, and is filled with great art to use as jumping-off points for places and characters. There's also an extensive **resource list** of novels, nonfiction books, and websites where you can learn more. Additionally, remember that this is an alternate version of Appalachia, so if you get anything "wrong," you can chalk it up to the many weirdnesses of the setting.

The only way you can really go wrong is by falling back on negative stereotypes of the people and the place. Those living in Appalachia are a **diverse group of people** with a rich, complex culture, so if you find yourself thinking of all Appalachian people as being poor, white, lazy, uneducated, and barefoot, it's time to take a big step back and start with some self-education. If you can't do an Appalachian accent or dialect without inherently making fun of it, don't do it. If

your entire goal is to run a game that makes fun of Appalachian people, this game is definitely not for you.

TIPS FOR PLAYING IN AN EXISTING WORLD

It can seem daunting to play a game in a story and setting that exists in a space beyond the roleplaying world, but it's the same as playing in any other game. You might think you should try not to "break the world"—meaning don't do anything at your table that would break with the existing setting and podcast. What if the characters destroy an important mining operation that's still part of the ongoing podcast?

Don't worry about this. As soon as you sit down at the table to play in the Old Gods of Appalachia setting, you're changing things. The NPCs will sound different than they do on the podcast; you'll be adding places, people, and things to the setting (in fact, this book does much of that already); and you don't want to take away players' autonomy just to try to keep things consistent (a nearly impossible goal anyway, since the podcast story is constantly evolving).

Don't close doors during your game just because something won't align with the podcast. If the characters need to raze most of the town of Barrow to achieve their goals, let them. Then encourage them to continue to move through a world that is irrevocably changed by their choices.

Think about the millions of Star Wars games that have been played around tables (and on computers). While a few might fit in perfectly with the story that's been portrayed on the screen (and on TV and in myriad books and in Christmas specials and on and on), most probably don't. Maybe (spoiler) Luke doesn't lose a hand in your game or Darth Vader has a redemption arc. It's all fine. It doesn't change the canon—and this is your game, to do with as you wish.

If it helps, consider the world you're playing in to be an alternate-alternate Appalachia, one that was created as soon as you cracked open this rulebook. If you've listened to the podcast and read this book, you already know how to create the *kinds* of stories that OGoA is about, and that's what really matters.

You can find out everything you've wanted to know but knew better than to ask at www.olgodssofappalachia.com



Quotes from episodes of the podcast appear throughout this book, marked by the symbol above.



Chapter 7: Goods and Currency, page 118

Resources and Recommended Reading, page 410

Getting to Know Appalachia, page 180

Melvin Blevins, page 21

Barrow, page 194

CHECK YOUR EXPECTATIONS

If you've listened to the OGoA podcast, you probably have certain ideas of how a roleplaying game based on that podcast might play out. You may have a very specific image in your mind of what **Melvin Blevins** looks and sounds like, but maybe your GM doesn't sound like that at all and their description of Melvin feels a little off. You may have pictured the streets of **Barrow** in detail, but as your character moves through them, they seem different somehow.

This is a normal part of taking a setting from one medium and turning it into another. You've probably experienced this while watching a TV show based on a favorite book, or when hearing an old song covered by a new band. It's nearly impossible for one medium to replicate another exactly because they have different needs, strengths, weaknesses, and techniques.

If you spend all your time thinking "This isn't as good as that," or "This isn't what I pictured," you're likely setting yourself up for disappointment. Sit down at the table assuming that things will be different, and be willing to embrace it.

It can be useful to talk with your group and particularly your game master (GM) ahead of time (or as part of the first session) about your hopes for the game. If the group knows what you're all hoping for when it comes to your perfect OGoA game, you can likely bring some of those pieces to the table in a satisfying way.

DON'T BE A SETTING LAWYER

You might be the group's resident expert on the OGoA podcast or the Appalachian region, but that doesn't mean you should correct someone every time they get something wrong or go off-book. One of the important elements of roleplaying games is the ability to riff off existing material and go your own way. There's no good reason to shut that down just to stick to a script that exists somewhere else in the world.

The one exception to this is if people start leaning on stereotypes or breaking the setting in big ways that don't make sense—for example, inserting a cell phone into a 1920s setting (unless, of course, your group is dealing with time travel elements).

On the other hand, do offer your knowledge to the group if they find it useful. Some players and GMs will care about "getting things right" and will appreciate having you there as a resource.



There are places in this world that humanity was never supposed to see—walled in by mountains of burning black rock, isolated by a choking canopy of poison flora, woods where tooth, claw, and hunger still sit atop the food chain. Long before our kind ever set foot in these mountains, when the peaks of the Blue Ridge towered above the stars, and the heart of the plateau still rolled with ridges tough as pine knobs, darkness was brought here in cages made of fear. Our tongues do not have the shape to speak the true names of what they are . . . and that's are, not were. They are hunger, consumption, lust—all the things that settle under the heart and below the ribcage. They are the cancer that will one day eat the edges of this universe, and leave nothing in its place. They are not evil. They are not of Hell or the Christian devil. They simply are.

—Season 1, Episode 0: Prologue

Chapter 2: THE OLD GODS OF APPALACHIA ROLEPLAYING GAME

You've probably played a roleplaying game before, but if not, here's a short overview.

A roleplaying game (RPG) is one in which a group of players create characters (called player characters, or PCs) and tell collective stories within a world or setting. One particular player, called the game master (GM), guides the other players through the experience, setting up challenges, describing scenes, and playing the role of other, nonplayer characters (NPCs).

The Old Gods of Appalachia Roleplaying Game uses the Cypher System rules. These rules are quite straightforward at their heart, as all of the gameplay is based around a few core concepts.

The Cypher System uses a twenty-sided die (d20) to determine the results of most actions. Whenever a roll of any kind is called for and no die is specified, roll a d20.

The game master sets a **difficulty** for any given task. There are ten degrees of difficulty. Thus, the difficulty of a task can be rated on a scale of 1 to 10.

Each difficulty has a target number associated with it. The target number is always three times the task's difficulty, so a difficulty 1 task has a target number of 3, and a difficulty 4 task has a target number of 12. To succeed at the task, you must roll the target number or higher on a d20. See the **Task Difficulty table** for guidance in how this works.

Character skills, favorable circumstances, or excellent equipment can decrease the difficulty of a task. For example, if a character is trained in climbing, they turn a difficulty 6 climb into a difficulty 5 climb. This is called **easing** the difficulty by one step (or just easing the difficulty, which assumes it's eased by one step). If they are specialized in climbing, they turn a difficulty 6 climb into

a difficulty 4 climb. This is called easing the difficulty by two steps. Decreasing the difficulty of a task can also be called easing a task. Some situations increase, or **hinder**, the difficulty of a task. If a task is hindered, it increases the difficulty by one step.

A **skill** is a category of knowledge, ability, or activity relating to a task, such as climbing, geography, or persuasiveness. A character who has a skill is better at completing related tasks than a character who lacks the skill. A character's level of skill is either trained (reasonably skilled) or specialized (very skilled).

If you are **trained** in a skill relating to a task, you ease the difficulty of that task by one step. If you are **specialized**, you ease the difficulty by two steps. A skill can never decrease a task's difficulty by more than two steps.

Anything else that reduces difficulty (help from an ally, a particular piece of equipment, or some other advantage) is referred to as an **asset**. Assets can never decrease a task's difficulty by more than two steps.

You can also decrease the difficulty of a given task by applying **Effort**. (Effort is described in more detail in chapter 8.)

To sum up, three things can decrease a task's difficulty: skills, assets, and Effort.

If you can ease a task so its difficulty is reduced to 0, you automatically succeed and don't need to make a roll.

This chapter provides a brief explanation of how to play the game, and it's useful for learning the basics.

Once you understand the general concepts, you'll likely want to reference

Chapter 8: Rules of the Game for a more in-depth description of how the game works.

Hinder, page 129

Skills, page 132

Trained, page 129

Specialized, page 129

Difficulty, page 129

Asset, page 132

Effort, page 132

Task Difficulty table, page 11

Easing, page 129

Chapter 8: Rules of the Game, page 128

GLOSSARY

Game master (GM): The player who doesn't run a character, but instead guides the flow of the story and runs all the NPCs.

Nonplayer character (NPC): Characters run by the GM. Think of them as the minor characters in the story, or the villains or opponents. This includes any kind of creature as well as people.

Party: A group of player characters (and perhaps some NPC companions and allies).

Player character (PC): A character run by a player rather than the GM. Think of the PCs as the main characters in the story.

Player: The players who run characters in the game.

Session: A single play experience. Usually lasts a few hours. Sometimes one adventure can be accomplished in a session. More often, one adventure is multiple sessions.

Adventure: A single portion of a campaign with a beginning and an end. Usually defined at the beginning by a goal put forth by the PCs and at the end by whether or not they achieve that goal.

Campaign: A series of sessions strung together with an overarching story (or linked stories) with the same player characters. Often, but not always, a campaign involves a number of adventures.

Character: Anything that can act in the game. This includes PCs, NPCs, and creatures.



Wampus, page 379

Special rolls, page 133

Many rules in this system avoid the cumbersome need for precision. Does it really matter if the wampus is 13 feet away from you or 18? Not likely. That kind of needless specificity only slows things down and draws away from, rather than contributes to, the story.

WHEN DO YOU ROLL?

Any time your character attempts a task, the GM assigns a difficulty to that task, and you roll a d20 against the associated target number.

When you jump from a moving train, swing your pick at a **wampus**, identify a strange creature, persuade a merchant to give you a lower price, craft an object, use an ability to sneak by someone, or employ an artifact to blast a hole in a wall, you make a d20 roll.

However, if you attempt something that has a difficulty of 0, no roll is needed—you automatically succeed. Many actions have a difficulty of 0. Examples include walking across the room and opening a door, chatting with a friend, using a special ability to hover in the air, or using a cypher to erect a barrier. These are all routine actions and don't require rolls.

Using skill, assets, and Effort, you can ease the difficulty of potentially any task to 0 and thus negate the need for a roll. Walking

across a narrow wooden beam is tricky for most people, but for an experienced gymnast, it's routine. You can even ease the difficulty of an attack on a foe to 0 and succeed without rolling.

If there's no roll, there's no chance for failure. However, there's also no chance for remarkable success (in the Cypher System, that usually means rolling a 19 or 20, which are called **special rolls**; chapter 8 also discusses special rolls).

COMBAT

Making an attack in combat works the same way as any other roll: the GM assigns a difficulty to the task, and you roll a d20 against the associated target number.

The difficulty of your attack roll depends on how powerful your opponent is. Just as tasks have a difficulty from 1 to 10, creatures have a level from 1 to 10. Most of the time, the difficulty of your attack roll is the same as the creature's level. For example, if you attack a level 2 guard, it's a level 2 task, so your target number is 6.

It's worth noting that players make all die rolls. If a character attacks a creature, the player makes an attack roll. If a creature attacks a character, the player makes a defense roll.



You don't earn experience points (XP) for killing foes or overcoming standard challenges in the course of play. Discovery is the soul of the Cypher System.

TASK DIFFICULTY TABLE

Task Difficulty	Description	Target No.	Guidance
0	Routine	0	Anyone can do this basically every time.
1	Simple	3	Most people can do this most of the time.
2	Standard	6	Typical task requiring focus, but most people can usually do this.
3	Demanding	9	Requires full attention; most people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
4	Difficult	12	Trained people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
5	Challenging	15	Even trained people often fail.
6	Intimidating	18	Normal people almost never succeed.
7	Formidable	21	Impossible without skills or great effort.
8	Heroic	24	A task worthy of tales told for years afterward.
9	Immortal	27	A task worthy of legends that last lifetimes.
10	Impossible	30	A task that normal humans couldn't consider (but one that doesn't break the laws of physics).

The damage dealt by an attack is not determined by a roll—it's a flat number based on the weapon or attack used. For example, an axe is a **medium weapon** so it always does 4 points of damage.

Your **Armor** characteristic reduces the damage you take from attacks directed at you. You get Armor from wearing physical armor (such as a leather jacket) or from special abilities.

Like weapon damage, Armor is a flat number, not a roll. If you're attacked, subtract your Armor from the damage you take. For example, a leather jacket gives you +1 to Armor, meaning that you take 1 less point of damage from attacks. If an attacker hits you with a knife for 2 points of damage while you're wearing a leather jacket, you take only 1 point of damage. If your Armor reduces the damage from an attack to 0, you take no damage from that attack.

When you see the word "Armor" capitalized in the game rules (other than in the name of a special ability), it refers to your Armor characteristic—the number you subtract from incoming damage. When you see the word "armor" with a lowercase "a," it refers to any physical armor you might wear.

Typical physical weapons come in three categories: light, medium and heavy.

Light weapons inflict only 2 points of damage, but they ease attack rolls because they are fast and easy to use. Examples of light weapons are punches, kicks, baseball

bats, knives, hand axes, darts, very small pistols, and whips. Weapons that are particularly small are light weapons.

Medium weapons inflict 4 points of damage. Medium weapons include hunting knives, bows, typical handguns, light rifles, sawed-off shotguns, pickaxes, and wrecking bars.

Heavy weapons inflict 6 points of damage. Heavy weapons include massive axes, heavy crossbows, rifles, and regular shotguns.

Medium weapons, page 125

Armor, page 124

For more on the types of weapons that characters can use, see Chapter 7: Goods and Currency, page 118.

SPECIAL ROLLS

When you roll a natural 19 (the d20 shows "19") and the roll is a success, you also have a minor effect. In combat, a minor effect inflicts 3 additional points of damage with your attack, or, if you'd prefer a special result, you could decide instead that you knock the foe back, distract them, or something similar. When not in combat, a minor effect could mean that you perform the action with particular grace. For example, when jumping down from a ledge, you land smoothly on your feet, or when trying to persuade someone, you convince them that you're smarter than you really are. In other words, you not only succeed but also go a bit further.

When you roll a natural 20 (the d20 shows "20") and the roll is a success, you also have a major effect. This is similar to a minor effect, but the results are more remarkable.





Intrusion, page 162
Hexenwolf, page 361

Distance, page 135

Experience points, page 162

GM intrusion, page 162

In combat, a major effect inflicts 4 additional points of damage with your attack, but again, you can choose instead to introduce a dramatic event such as knocking down your foe, stunning them, or taking an extra action.

Outside of combat, a major effect means that something beneficial happens based on the circumstance. For example, when climbing up a cliff wall, you make the ascent twice as fast. When a roll grants you a major effect, you can choose to use a minor effect instead if you prefer.

In combat (and only in combat), if you roll a natural 17 or 18 on your attack roll, you add 1 or 2 additional points of damage, respectively. Neither roll has any special effect options— just the extra damage.

Rolling a natural 1 means that the GM introduces a new complication into the encounter via an **intrusion**.

RANGE AND SPEED

Distance is simplified into four categories: immediate, short, long, and very long.

Immediate distance from a character is within reach or within a few steps. If a character stands in a small room, everything in the room is within immediate distance. At most, immediate distance is 10 feet (3 m).

Short distance is anything greater than immediate distance but less than 50 feet (15 m) or so.

Long distance is anything greater than short distance but less than 100 feet (30 m) or so.

Very long distance is anything greater than long distance but less than 500 feet (150 m) or so. Beyond that range, distances are always specified—1,000 feet (300 m), a mile (1.5 km), and so on.

The idea is that it's not necessary to measure precise distances. Immediate distance is right there, practically next to the character. Short distance is nearby. Long distance is farther off. Very long distance is really far off.

All weapons and special abilities use these terms for ranges. For example, all melee weapons have immediate range—they are

close-combat weapons, and you can use them to attack anyone within immediate distance.

Most thrown weapons (such as a knife) and many character abilities have short range. Weapons like bows have long range.

A character can move an immediate distance as part of another action. In other words, they can take a few steps over to the fire and grab a fire iron. They can lunge across a small room to attack a foe. They can open a door and step through.

A character can move a short distance as their entire action for a turn. They can also try to move a long distance as their entire action, but the player might have to roll; if they fail, it means that at some point, they slip, stumble, or otherwise get held up.

For example, if the PCs are fighting a pack of **hexenwolves**, any character can likely attack any of the creatures in the general melee—they're all within immediate range. Exact positions aren't important. Creatures in a fight are always moving, shifting, and jostling, anyway. However, if one hexenwolf stayed back to release a damaging howl, a character might have to use their entire action to move the short distance required to attack that foe. It doesn't matter if the character is 20 feet (6 m) or 40 feet (12 m) away—it's simply considered short distance. It does matter if the character is more than 50 feet (15 m) away because that distance would require a long or very long move.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Experience points (XP) are rewards given to players when the GM intrudes on the story (this is called **GM intrusion**) with a new and unexpected challenge. For example, in the middle of combat, the GM might inform the player that they drop their weapon. However, to intrude in this manner, the GM must award the player 2 XP. The rewarded player, in turn, must immediately give one of those XP to another player and justify the gift (perhaps the other player had a good idea, told a funny joke, performed an action that saved a life, and so on).

Alternatively, the player can refuse the GM intrusion. If they do so, they don't get the 2 XP from the GM, and they must also spend 1 XP that they already have. If the



player has no XP to spend, they can't refuse the intrusion.

The GM can also give players XP between sessions as a reward for making discoveries during an adventure. Discoveries are interesting facts, wondrous secrets, powerful artifacts, answers to mysteries, or solutions to problems (such as where the kidnappers are keeping their victim or how to repair a broken mining elevator). You don't earn XP for killing foes or overcoming standard challenges in the course of play. Discovery is the soul of the Cypher System.

Experience points are used primarily for character advancement (for details, see [Chapter 3: Creating Your Character](#)), but a player can also spend 1 XP to reroll any die roll and take the better of the two rolls.

CYPHERS

Cyphers are single-use items. They're often handcrafted items, such as witch jars, poppets, and special foods. They might allow you to gain extra strength or become temporarily invisible. Each character has a cypher limit indicating how many cyphers they can have at the same time.

Characters will find new cyphers frequently in the course of play, so players shouldn't hesitate to use their cypher abilities. Because cyphers are always different, the characters will always have new special powers to try.



Cyphers, page 311

Chapter 3: Creating Your Character, page 16

Artifacts, page 330

Form-fillable, printable character sheets are also available to download for free at mymcg.info/ogoa-character-sheet

Creating Your Character in 5 Easy Steps, page 17
Character sheet, page 415

For additional information on consent and safety tools, download the free Consent in Gaming PDF at mymcg.info/consent.

Consent checklist, page 411



ARTIFACTS

Artifacts are powerful items that have multiple uses. An artifact might be a bone-handled knife that aids in combat, an ancient walking stick that offers special insight, or a piece of clothing specially crafted to provide additional protection.

Because artifacts are so powerful, they come with a cost. When an artifact “comes due” (a specific roll on a d20), the player must decide whether to pay the cost required or allow the artifact’s power to disappear. The cost might be to complete a difficult task for the creator of the artifact, to give up an important memory to the artifact itself, or to make a pledge to some entity in exchange for the artifact’s continued use.



OTHER DICE

In addition to a d20, you’ll need a d6 (a six-sided die). Rarely, you’ll need to roll a number between 1 and 100 (often called a d100 or d% roll), which you can do by rolling a d20 twice, using the last digit of the first roll as the “tens” place and the last digit of the second roll as the “ones” place. For example, rolling a 17 and a 9 gives you 79, rolling a 3 and an 18 gives you 38, and rolling a 20 and a 10 gives you 00 (also known as 100). If you have a d10 (a ten-sided die), you can use it instead of the d20 to roll numbers between 1 and 100.

YOUR CHARACTER

You can create your character using the process outlined in chapter 3 along with the **character creation walkthrough** and the **character sheet** at the back of this book. The sheet keeps track of your abilities, equipment, experience, and other elements of your character.

CONSENT AND SAFETY TOOLS

As you may have noticed, Old Gods of Appalachia is, at its heart, a horror setting. That means it’s important to use good consent and safety tools in your game. These tools ensure that everyone gets scared or uncomfortable only as much as they want to be, and that everyone has consented to the premise and expectations of the game. This is sometimes described as the difference between “good uncomfortable” (something that makes you squirm in your seat in a great horror movie) and “bad uncomfortable” (something that makes you feel nauseated, in danger, or offended). Being scared can be fun, but feeling unsafe isn’t.

You might be perfectly comfortable with viscous, many-eyed creatures rising up out of the ground during a game but feel uncomfortable with the idea of your character being buried alive. You might enjoy fighting all manner of beasts that resemble bears or moose but don’t want to hurt anything that looks or sounds like a dog. Maybe you’re all in on hearing the gory details of what happens when you dismember someone but have no interest in an explicit description of a skin rash.

Whatever your thing is, you have the right to not have it in your game.

At the back of this book, you’ll find a consent checklist that can be used when planning a game. It includes many of the scary or uncomfortable things you’ll find in alternate Appalachia. As with the general checklist in the *Consent in Gaming* PDF, the GM can print or photocopy one for each player and themselves. Each player then fills out their own form and returns it to the GM.

By having a conversation about consent ahead of time and using the consent and safety tools, you can ensure that you—and the rest of your group—get all the scares you ask for and none of the ones you don’t.

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT CONSENT

- You decide what’s safe and right for you.
- No one has to explain their choices.
- There’s a spectrum of consent for each topic.
- Anyone can always change their mind about what they are or aren’t consenting to.
- Anyone is allowed to leave an uncomfortable situation at any time.

Part 2: WELCOME TO THE FAMILY



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Chapter 3: CREATING YOUR CHARACTER

This chapter explains how to create characters to play in an Old Gods of Appalachia game. This involves a series of decisions that will shape your character, so the more you understand what kind of character you want to play, the easier character creation will be. The process involves understanding the values of three game statistics and choosing four aspects that determine your character's capabilities.

CHARACTER STATS

Every player character has three defining characteristics, which are typically called "statistics" or "stats." These stats are Might, Speed, and Intellect. They are broad categories that cover many different but related aspects of a character.

MIGHT

Might defines how strong and durable your character is. The concepts of strength, endurance, constitution, hardiness, and physical prowess are all folded into this one stat. Might isn't relative to size; instead, it's an absolute measurement. An elephant has more Might than the mightiest tiger, which has more Might than the mightiest rat, which has more Might than the mightiest spider.

Might governs actions from forcing doors open to walking for days without food to resisting disease. It's also the primary means of determining how much damage your character can sustain in a dangerous situation. Physical characters, tough characters, and characters interested in fighting and defending others should focus on Might.

SPEED

Speed describes how fast and physically coordinated your character is. The stat embodies quickness, movement, dexterity, and reflexes. Speed governs such divergent actions as dodging attacks, sneaking around quietly, and throwing a ball accurately. It helps determine whether you can move farther on your turn. Nimble, fast, or sneaky characters will want good Speed stats, as will those interested in ranged combat.

INTELLECT

This stat determines how smart, knowledgeable, and likable your character is. It includes intelligence, wisdom, charisma, education, reasoning, wit, willpower, and charm. Intellect governs solving puzzles, remembering facts, telling convincing lies, and using mental powers. Characters interested in communicating effectively, being learned scholars, or wielding time-altering devices should stress their Intellect stat.

Your stats tell you a lot about how well your character can do things, but they are not the heart of your character. The heart of your character is their personality, their voice, their connections to others, and the other attributes that you, the player, choose to give them. In other words, stats are important, but they are just one part of a fully fleshed-out character.



CREATING YOUR CHARACTER IN 5 EASY STEPS

First, grab a pen and a blank piece of paper (or a character sheet) to record your choices.

1. Choose from one of four **types** in chapter 4. Follow the instructions provided for gaining your stats, abilities, equipment, and cyphers. A **walk-through example** of a player creating a character accompanies each type. Each example showcases a player following all the steps presented here.
2. Choose a **descriptor** from chapter 5.
3. Choose a **focus** from chapter 6.
4. Choose a **character arc** from chapter 9.
5. Begin your adventure!

POOL, EDGE, AND EFFORT

Each of the three stats has two components: Pool and Edge. Your Pool represents your raw, innate ability, and your Edge represents knowing how to use what you have. A third element ties into this concept: Effort. When your character really needs to accomplish a task, you apply Effort.

POOL

Your Pool is the most basic measurement of a stat. Comparing the Pools of two creatures will give you a general sense of which creature is superior in that stat. For example, Marian has a Might Pool of 18, and thus is stronger than Clarence, who has a Might Pool of 12.

When your character is injured, sickened, or attacked, you temporarily lose points from one of your stat Pools. The nature of the attack determines which Pool loses points. For example, physical damage from an axe reduces your Might Pool, a poison that makes you clumsy reduces your Speed Pool, and being affected by **Power of the Voice** reduces your Intellect Pool. You can also spend points from one of your stat Pools to decrease a task's difficulty (see Effort, below). You can rest to recover lost points from a stat Pool, and some special abilities or cyphers might allow you to **recover lost points** quickly.

EDGE

Although your Pool is the basic measurement of a stat, your Edge is also important. When something requires you to spend points from a stat Pool, your Edge for that stat reduces the cost. It also reduces the cost of applying Effort to a roll.

For example, let's say you have an ability that allows you to sing a healing song, and activating it costs 1 point from your Intellect Pool. Subtract your Intellect Edge from the activation cost, and the result is how many points you must spend to use the ability. If using your Edge reduces the cost to 0, you can use the ability for free.

Your Edge can be different for each stat. For example, you could have a Might Edge of 1, a Speed Edge of 1, and an Intellect Edge of 0.

You'll always have an Edge of at least 1 in one stat. Your Edge for a stat reduces the cost of spending points from that stat Pool, but not from other Pools. Your Might Edge reduces the cost of spending points from your Might Pool, but it doesn't affect your Speed Pool or Intellect Pool.

Once a stat's Edge reaches 3, you can apply one level of Effort for free.

A character who has a low Might Pool but a high Might Edge has the potential to perform Might actions consistently better than a character who has a Might Edge of 0. The high Edge will let them reduce the cost of spending points from the Pool, which means they'll have more points available to spend on applying Effort.

EFFORT

When your character really needs to accomplish a task, you can apply Effort. For a beginning character, applying Effort requires spending 3 points from the stat Pool appropriate to the action. Thus, if your character tries to dodge an attack (a Speed roll) and wants to increase the chance for success, you can apply Effort by spending 3 points from your Speed Pool. Effort eases the task by one step. This is called applying one level of Effort.

You don't have to apply Effort if you don't want to. If you choose to apply Effort to a task, you must do it before you attempt the roll—you can't roll first and then decide to apply Effort if you rolled poorly.

Types, page 24

Protector example, page 31

Sage example, page 41

Explorer example, page 50

Speaker example, page 61

Descriptor, page 62

Focus, page 83

Character arc, page 162

Power of the Voice, page 114

Recovery roll, page 142

Slicing Skein, page 38

Applying more Effort can lower a task's difficulty further: each additional level of Effort eases the task by another step. Applying one level of Effort eases the task by one step, applying two levels eases the task by two steps, and so on. Each level of Effort after the first costs only 2 points from the stat Pool instead of 3. So applying two levels of Effort costs 5 points (3 for the first level plus 2 for the second level), applying three levels costs 7 points (3 plus 2 plus 2), and so on.

Every character has an Effort score, which indicates the maximum number of levels of Effort that can be applied to a roll. A beginning (what we call a first-tier) character has an Effort of 1, meaning you can apply only one level of Effort to a roll. A more experienced character has a higher Effort score and can apply more levels of Effort to a roll. For example, a character who has an Effort of 3 can apply up to three levels of Effort to ease a task.

When you apply Effort, you get to subtract your relevant Edge from the total cost of applying Effort. For example, let's say you need to make a Speed roll. To increase your chance for success, you decide to apply one level of Effort, which will ease the task. Normally, that would cost 3 points from your Speed Pool. However, you can subtract your Speed Edge from the cost. Thus, if you have a Speed Edge of 1, applying Effort to the roll costs only 2 points from your Speed Pool.

What if you applied two levels of Effort to the Speed roll instead of just one? That would ease the task by two steps. Normally, it would cost 5 points from your Speed Pool, but after subtracting your Speed Edge of 1, it costs only 4 points.

Once a stat's Edge reaches 3, you can apply one level of Effort for free. For example, if you have a Speed Edge of 3 and you apply one level of Effort to a Speed roll, it costs you 0 points from your Speed Pool. (Normally, applying one level of Effort would cost 3 points, but you subtract your Speed Edge from that cost, reducing it to 0.)

Skills and other advantages also ease a task, and you can use them in conjunction with Effort. In addition, your character might have special abilities or equipment that allow you to apply Effort to accomplish a special effect, such as knocking down a foe

with an attack or affecting multiple targets with a power that normally affects only one.

EFFORT AND DAMAGE

Instead of applying Effort to ease your attack, you can apply Effort to increase the amount of damage you inflict with an attack. For each level of Effort you apply in this way, you inflict 3 additional points of damage. This works for any kind of attack that inflicts damage, whether an axe, a gun, a spoken word, or something else.

When using Effort to increase the damage of an area attack, such as with the Sage's *Slicing Skein* ability, you inflict only 2 additional points of damage instead of 3 points. However, the additional points are dealt to all targets in the area. Furthermore, even if a target resists the attack, they still take 1 point of damage.

MULTIPLE USES OF EFFORT AND EDGE

If your Effort is 2 or higher, you can apply Effort to multiple aspects of a single action. For example, if you make an attack, you can apply Effort once to your attack roll and apply Effort once to increase the damage.

The total amount of Effort you apply can't be higher than your Effort score. For example, if your Effort is 2, you can apply up to two levels of Effort. You could apply one level to an attack roll and one level to its damage, two levels to the attack and no levels to the damage, or no levels to the attack and two levels to the damage.

You can use Edge for a particular stat only once per action. For example, if you apply Effort to a Might attack roll and to your damage, you can use your Might Edge to reduce the cost of one of those uses of Effort, not both. If you spend Intellect points to activate your slicing skein and one level of Effort to ease the attack roll, you can use your Intellect Edge to reduce the cost of one of those things, not both.

STAT EXAMPLES

Myrtle, a beginning character, is fighting a **shuck**. Myrtle swings her axe at the shuck, which is a level 2 creature and thus has a target number of 6. She stands atop a fallen tree and strikes downward at the creature, and the GM rules that this helpful tactic is an asset that eases the attack by one step, lowering it to difficulty 1. That lowers the target number to 3. Attacking with an axe is a Might action; Myrtle has a Might Pool of 11 and a Might Edge of 0. Before making the roll, the character decides to apply a level of Effort to ease the attack. That costs 3 points from her Might Pool, reducing the Pool to 8. But the points are well spent. Applying the Effort lowers the difficulty from 1 to 0, so no roll is needed—the attack automatically succeeds.

Another character named Dean is attempting to persuade a protective mother to let him into her home so he can try to heal her ailing son. The GM rules that this is an Intellect action. Dean is a more advanced character (tier 3) and has an Effort of 3, an Intellect Pool of 13, and an Intellect Edge of 1. Before making the roll, he must decide whether to apply Effort. He can choose to apply one, two, or three levels of Effort, or apply none at all. Being able to help the child is important to him, so he decides to apply two levels of Effort, easing the task by two steps. Thanks to his Intellect Edge, applying the Effort costs only 4 points from his Intellect Pool (3 points for the first level of Effort plus 2 points for the second level minus 1 point for his Edge). Spending those points reduces his Intellect Pool to 9. The GM decides that because the mother is so protective and suspicious of strangers, convincing her is a difficulty 3 (demanding) task with a target number of 9; applying two levels of Effort reduces the difficulty to 1 (simple) and the target number to 3. The player rolls a d20 and gets an 8. Because this result is at least equal to the target number of the task, they succeed. However, if they had not applied some Effort, they would have failed because their roll of 8 would have been less than the task's original target number of 9.

CHARACTER TIERS

Tier is a measurement of power, toughness, and ability. Every character starts the game at the first tier. Characters can advance up to the sixth tier. As your character advances to higher tiers, you gain more abilities, increase your Effort, and can improve a stat's Edge or increase a stat. Generally speaking, even first-tier characters are already quite capable. It's safe to assume that they've got some experience under their belt. This is not a "zero to hero" progression, but rather an instance of competent people refining and honing their capabilities and knowledge. Advancing to higher tiers is not really the goal of Cypher System characters, but rather a representation of how characters progress in a story.

To progress to the next tier, characters earn **experience points** (XP) by pursuing character arcs, going on adventures, and discovering new things—the system is about both discovery and exploration, as well as achieving personal goals. Experience points have many uses, and one use is to purchase character benefits. After your character purchases four character benefits, they advance to the next tier. Each benefit costs 4 XP, and you can purchase them in any order, but you must purchase one of each kind of benefit (and then advance to the next tier) before you can purchase the same benefit again. The four character benefits are as follows.

Increasing Capabilities: You gain 4 points to add to your stat Pools. You can allocate the points among the Pools however you wish.

Moving Toward Perfection: You add 1 to your Might Edge, your Speed Edge, or your Intellect Edge (your choice).

Extra Effort: Your Effort score increases by 1.

Skill: You become trained in one skill of your choice, other than attacks or defense. As described in **chapter 8**, a character trained in a skill treats the difficulty of a related task as one step lower than normal. The skill you choose for this benefit can be anything you wish, such as climbing, jumping, persuading, or sneaking. You can also choose to be knowledgeable in a certain

Shuck, page 373



Experience points, page 162

Having an inability is the opposite of being trained—you're hindered whenever you attempt a task that you have an inability in.

Inability, page 129

Chapter 8: Rules of the Game, page 128

Protector, page 25

Sage, page 33

Explorer, page 42

Speaker, page 51

There is a place on your character sheet to track which achievements you have completed.

Cost for wearing armor, page 124

Recovery roll, page 142

Each type has a number of "identity suggestions" to help deepen your character. For example, a Sage might be a Nurse, Healer, Granny, or Witch.

area of lore, such as history or geology. You can even choose a skill based on your character's special abilities. For example, if your character can make an Intellect roll to damage an enemy with a mental power, you can become trained in using that ability, easing the task of using it. If you choose a skill that you are already trained in, you become specialized in that skill, easing related tasks by two steps instead of one.

Other Options: Players can also spend 4 XP to purchase other special options in lieu of gaining a new skill. Selecting any of these options counts as purchasing one of the four stages necessary to advance to the next tier (the other three need to be from the other categories).

The special options are as follows:

- Reduce the **cost for wearing armor**. This option lowers the Speed cost for wearing armor by 1.
- Add 2 to your **recovery rolls**.
- Select a new ability from your type, either from your tier or from a lower tier.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTOR, TYPE, AND FOCUS

To create your character, you build a simple statement that describes them. The statement takes this form: "I am a [fill in an adjective here] [fill in a noun here] who [fill in a verb here]."

Thus: "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*." For example, you might say, "I am a Creative Healer (Sage) who Makes a High Lonesome Sound" or "I am a Charming Preacher (Speaker) who Serves the Green."

In this sentence, the adjective is called your descriptor.

The noun is your character type.

The verb is called your focus.

Even though character type is in the middle of the sentence, that's where we'll start this discussion. (Just as in a sentence, the noun provides the foundation.)

Your character type is the core of your character. In some roleplaying games, it might be called your character class. Your type helps determine your character's place in the world and relationship with other people in the setting. It's the noun of the

sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*."

You can choose from four character types in chapter 4: **Protectors**, **Sages**, **Explorers**, and **Speakers**. Each type has specific monikers that you should choose from to personalize your character. For example, instead of an Explorer, you could call yourself a Hunter, Miner, Smuggler, or Firefighter.

Your descriptor defines your character—it colors everything you do. Your descriptor places your character in the situation (the first adventure, which starts the campaign) and helps provide motivation. It's the adjective of the sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*." You can choose from many descriptors in chapter 5.

Focus is what your character does best. Focus gives your character specificity and provides interesting new abilities that might come in handy. Your focus also helps you understand how you relate with the other player characters in your group. It's the verb of the sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*." There are many character foci in chapter 6, all of which allow your character to embrace a unique aspect of themselves and their talents.

The following are examples of character sentences to get you started:

- A Brash Logger (Protector) who Walks These Woods
- A Hardy Miner (Explorer) who Delves the Darkness
- A Neighborly Folk Healer (Sage) who Makes a High Lonesome Sound
- A Charming Preacher (Speaker) who Serves the Green



SO YOU WANT TO PLAY A . . .

You can create a lot of different characters in this game, and if you're new to roleplaying games or the Old Gods of Appalachia podcast, it can feel a bit overwhelming. So here's a quick and handy guide for how to start building the character you want to play.

None of these suggestions are set in stone—they're just a few ideas for where you could start. Always feel free to go your own way to make your character your own.

Community Leader (podcast examples: Douglass "D.L." Walker, Pastor Garvin, Sheriff Andy Hodge)

- A Cursed Speaker who Speaks in Tongues
- An Honorable Protector who Defends What Matters

Good Neighbor/Community Member (podcast examples: Tobias Underwood, Miss Belle)

- A Neighborly Protector who Delves the Darkness
- An Industrious Explorer who Shares the Ways and Signs

Healer (podcast examples: Granny Underwood)

- A Mystical Sage who Cures What Ails Ya

Helper/Handyman (podcast examples: Melvin Blevins, Junior Metcalf)

- A Gracious Protector who Defends What Matters
- A Loyal Explorer who Does What Needs Doin'

Magic User (podcast examples: any of the Walker Sisters)

- A Mystical Sage who Possesses the Gift
- An Uncanny Sage who Serves the Green

Trickster (podcast examples: J.T. Fields III)

- A Charming Speaker who Knows Jack



SPECIAL ABILITIES

Character types and foci grant PCs special abilities at every tier. Using your abilities typically costs points from your stat Pools; the cost is listed in parentheses after the ability name. Your Edge in the appropriate stat can reduce the cost of the ability, but remember that you can apply Edge only once per action.

For example, let's say a Speaker with an Intellect Edge of 2 wants to use their *Shake the Bones* ability, which costs 1 Intellect point, to attack a foe. They also want to increase the damage from the attack by using a level of Effort, which costs 3 Intellect points. The total cost for their action is 2 points from their Intellect Pool (1 point for *Shake the Bones*, plus 3 points for using Effort, minus 2 points from their Edge).

Sometimes the point cost for an ability has a + sign after the number. For example, the cost might be given as "2+ Intellect points." That means you can spend more

points or more levels of Effort to improve the ability further, as explained in the ability description.

Many special abilities grant a character the option to perform an action that they couldn't normally do, such as making themselves unseen or attacking multiple foes at once. Using one of these abilities is an action unto itself, and the end of the ability's description says "Action" to remind you. It also might provide more information about when or how you perform the action.

Some special abilities allow you to perform a familiar action—one that you can already do—in a different way. For example, an ability might let you wear heavy armor, reduce the difficulty of Speed defense rolls, or add 2 points of Green damage to your weapon damage. These abilities are called *enablers*. Using one of these abilities is not considered an action. Enablers either function constantly (such as being able to wear heavy armor, which isn't an action) or

Shake the Bones, page 54



Knowing Tommy's experience with farm work, Jack had asked that he clear that patch of land, which he thought would make a fine spot for growing some tobacco. So Tommy had taken his truck out there early one morning, just as the sun was peeking over the hills, pulled on a heavy pair of work gloves, and set to ripping up vines and nettles.

—Season 2, Episode 28: Paradise Lost

Your character can be skilled in almost anything, from pumpkin farming to sensing the Green. If there's something you want your character to be able to do well, talk with your GM about the best way to name and utilize it.

happen as part of another action (such as adding fire damage to your weapon damage, which happens as part of your attack action). If a special ability is an enabler, the end of the ability's description says "Enabler" to remind you.

Some abilities specify a duration, but you can always end one of your own abilities anytime you wish.

Each ability is typically labeled as either Action or Enabler. If an ability is labeled Action, a character must take an action to use it. If an ability is labeled Enabler, it makes other actions better or gives some other benefit, but it's not an action. For example, an ability that allows a character to make a surprise attack is an action; an ability that grants additional damage when an attack is made is an enabler. An enabler is used in the same turn as another action, and often as part of another action.

SKILLS

Sometimes your character gains training in a specific skill or task. For example, your focus might mean that you're trained in sneaking, in climbing and jumping, or in social interactions. Other times, your character can choose a skill to become trained in, and you can pick a skill that relates to any task you think you might face.

To help you build the character you want to build, there is no definitive list of skills. However, the list on the following page offers ideas.

You could choose a skill that incorporates more than one of these areas (interacting might include deceiving, intimidation,

and persuasion) or that is a more specific version of one (hiding might be sneaking when you're not moving). You could also choose more general professional skills, such as teacher, miner, moonshiner, or fisher. If you want to choose a skill that's not on this list, it's probably best to run it past the GM first, but in general, the most important thing is to choose skills that are appropriate to your character.

Remember that if you gain a skill that you're already trained in, you become specialized in that skill. Because skill descriptions can be nebulous, determining whether you're trained or specialized might take some thinking. For example, if you're trained in deceiving and later gain an ability that grants you skill with all social interactions, you become specialized in deceiving and trained in all other types of interactions. Being trained three times in a skill is no better than being trained twice (in other words, specialized is as good as it gets).

You can't become trained or specialized in attack or defense tasks, except through certain type or focus abilities.

If you gain a special ability through your type, your focus, or some other aspect of your character, you can choose it in place of a skill and become trained or specialized in that ability. For example, if you have the **Shake the Bones** ability, when it's time to choose a skill to be trained in, you can select Shake the Bones as your skill. That would ease the attack every time you use it. Each ability you have counts as a separate skill for this purpose. You can't select "all magical powers" or "all attacks" as one skill and become trained or specialized in such a broad category.

Shake the Bones, page 54

SKILLS

Balancing	Geography	Philosophy
Blacksmithing	Geology	Pickpocketing
Blockading	Healing	Riding
Boating	Herbalism	Smashing
Carrying	Hiding	Sneaking
Climbing	History	Spinning
Cooking	Hunting	Stealth
Crafting	Identifying	Swimming
Crafting magic*	Initiative	Teaching
Deceiving	Intimidation	Train hopping
Disguise	Jumping	Understanding magic*
Entangling	Knowing the unknowable	Understanding motivations
Escaping	Lockpicking	Using magic*
Farming	Mining	Weaving
Fishing	Navigation	Wood carving
Foraging	Perception	Working with animals
Gardening	Persuasion	

Blockading is the skill of making illegal whiskey or moonshine.

* This skill requires detailed knowledge. If you aren't trained or specialized in this skill, you have an inability in the skill. See Inability, page 129.



Chapter 4: CHARACTER TYPE

Character type is the core of your character. Your type helps determine your character's place in the world and relationship with other people in the setting. It's the noun of the sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*."

You can choose from four character types: **Protector**, **Sage**, **Explorer**, and **Speaker**.

Within your type, you may also choose an identity. These are often job-related, such as Logger, Railroad Worker, or Librarian, but they might be life-related, such as Veteran or Granny. Your identity doesn't give you any special abilities—it's purely a narrative device to deepen and expand your character, if you choose to do so. You can pick an identity when you build your character or add it later, after your character grows and becomes more connected to the world around them.

Each of the character types offers suggestions for identities, but they're just

that—suggestions. You can also come up with an identity of your own; just check with your GM and make sure it works with the setting.

Protector, page 25

Sage, page 33

Explorer, page 42

Speaker, page 51

GM intrusion, page 162

Player intrusions should be limited to no more than one per player per session.

As you build your character, remember that wearing physical armor regularly in this setting is pretty rare. You can take abilities related to physical armor, but you might not use them that often.

DEFENSE TASKS

Defense tasks are when a player makes a roll to keep something undesirable from happening to their PC. The type of defense task matters when using Effort.

Might defense: Used for resisting poison, disease, and anything else that can be overcome with strength and health.

Speed defense: Used for dodging attacks and escaping danger. This is by far the most commonly used defense task.

Intellect defense: Used for fending off mental attacks or anything that might affect or influence one's mind.

PLAYER INTRUSION

A player intrusion is the player choosing to alter something in the campaign, making things easier for a player character. Conceptually, it is the reverse of a **GM intrusion**: instead of the GM giving the player XP and introducing an unexpected complication for a character, the player spends 1 XP and presents a solution to a problem or complication. What a player intrusion can do usually introduces a change to the world or current circumstances rather than directly changing the character. For instance, an intrusion indicating that the cypher just used still has an additional use would be appropriate, but an intrusion that heals the character would not. If a player has no XP to spend, they can't use a player intrusion.

A few player intrusion examples are provided under each type. That said, not every player intrusion listed there is appropriate for all situations. The GM may allow players to come up with other intrusion suggestions, but the GM is the final arbiter of whether the suggested intrusion is appropriate for the character's type and suitable for the situation. If the GM refuses the intrusion, the player doesn't spend the 1 XP, and the intrusion doesn't occur.

Using an intrusion does not require a character to use an action to trigger it. A player intrusion just happens.

PROTECTOR

Everyone wants you by their side when the going gets tough—especially when that going's of the physical sort. You're a good friend to have in a fight, a ruckus, or any intense physical situation. You know your way around weapons and are good at keeping yourself—and others—safe from harm.

Whether you're fighting creatures of the Inner Dark, protecting your friends from attackers, or defending your honor in a local *Rough and Rowdy*, you're a tough and talented protector with lots of abilities and weapons at your disposal.

Unlike some of the others you spend time with, magic's not really your thing. Oh, you might be stronger or swifter due to some innate magic within you, but you don't necessarily wield, use, or understand it. Protectors who wish to change that should consider taking a magic-based *focus*.

Identity Suggestions: Bodyguard, Butcher, Engineer, Guard, Logger, Prison Guard, Railroad Worker, Sheriff, Shepherd, Veteran

Individual Role: Protectors are physical and action-oriented. They're more likely to overcome a challenge using force than by other means, and they often take the most straightforward path toward their goals. Of all the types, Protectors are usually the least directly involved with using magic, although some may have interesting abilities given by their focus.

Group Role: Protectors usually take and deal the most physical punishment in a dangerous situation. Often it falls on them to protect the other group members from physical threats. This means that Protectors might take on leadership roles as well, at least in combat and other times of danger. Either way, a Protector's place is usually in the middle of the fray.

Societal Role: Protectors play a number of roles in the world. They might fight to get that chip off their shoulder, to prove their worth, to protect what matters, or just because they love the feel of getting down and dirty. Often, their prowess earns them respect, but if taken too far, it can have the opposite effect.

Advanced Protectors: As Protectors advance, their skills—whether defending themselves and others or dishing out damage—increase to impressive levels. At higher tiers, they can often take on groups of foes by themselves or stand toe to toe with the most dangerous of enemies.

Rough and Rowdy, page 257

Focus, page 83



PROTECTOR BACKGROUND

Your type helps determine the connection you have to the setting. Roll a d20 or choose from the following list to determine a specific fact about your background that provides a connection to the rest of the world. You can also create your own background (or adjust these as you see fit).

d20 Background

- 1 You've done a whole lot of odd jobs for a whole lot of people, and almost all of them regard you fondly.
- 2 You worked for the **Barrow family** for years. How and why you were able to leave is a story that's yours to tell, if you dare.
- 3 You were in the war, as were many of your friends and family. You stay in touch with a few of them.
- 4 You were the pride of your local community due to your success in the amateur boxing events called **Rough and Rowdy**.
- 5 You served as a prison guard until you retired. You knew how to keep things in order, but you suspect some of the prisoners might not recall you fondly.
- 6 You trained under a highly respected blacksmith but found the work wasn't for you. Now that your mentor is older, you help them out around their shop sometimes.
- 7 You were the bodyguard of a wealthy woman who accused you of theft. You left her service in disgrace.
- 8 All your fighting skills come from protecting your younger siblings and cousins, and occasionally yourself.
- 9 You worked as a sheriff or police chief in a nearby town. Everyone knows you, but their opinions of you vary.
- 10 As a child, you fought off a creature in the woods that you have no name for. You still have no idea how you survived, but ever since, you've had an unnatural ability to protect yourself.
- 11 You worked as a bouncer at a local saloon or brothel for a while, and the patrons there remember you.
- 12 Your best friend is a teacher or scholar. They are a great source of knowledge.
- 13 You helped build the railway in this area and to this day still feel a great deal of pride when you hear a train in the distance.
- 14 You were in prison for a while and had a mentor there who taught you how to protect yourself and those you care for.
- 15 You've worked for myriad logging companies over the years, and you could tell some stories about the woods, if you thought anyone would believe them.
- 16 Your uncle's the best-known secret moonshiner in the area, and since you were little, you've helped him out.
- 17 You were conscripted into military service, but you exempted out.
- 18 Your older sibling is an infamous character who has been disgraced.
- 19 Someone you worked alongside in the mines is now the mayor of a nearby town.
- 20 You saved the lives of a neighboring family when their house burned down. They're indebted to you.

Barrow family, page 196

Rough and Rowdy, page 257

PROTECTOR PLAYER INTRUSIONS

You can spend 1 XP to use one of the following player intrusions, provided the situation is appropriate and the GM agrees.

Perfect Setup: You're fighting at least three foes, and each one is standing in exactly the right spot for you to use a move you trained in long ago, allowing you to attack all three as a single action. Make a separate attack roll for each foe. You remain limited by the amount of Effort you can apply on one action.

Unexpected Arrival: Someone you've interacted with in the past is in the area and willing to help you out. They're on their way somewhere and can't stay longer than it takes to help out, chat for a while after, and perhaps share a quick meal.

Induce Fear: Something about your presence, attack, or vocalization imbues your attacker with fear so that they falter and fall back. All of their actions against you (including defense) are hindered for two rounds.

PROTECTOR STAT POOLS

Stat	Pool Starting Value
Might	10
Speed	10
Intellect	8

You get 6 additional points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish.

FIRST-TIER PROTECTOR

First-tier Protectors have the following abilities:

Effort: Your Effort is 1.

Physical Nature: You have a Might Edge of 1 and a Speed Edge of 0, or you have a Might Edge of 0 and a Speed Edge of 1. Either way, you have an Intellect Edge of 0.

Cypher Use: You can bear two cyphers at a time.

Area of Knowledge: You are trained in one noncombat Protector-related area of knowledge in which you are not already trained. Choose one of the following: butchering, engineering, laws, logging, mining, prison systems, or railroading. Enabler.

Weapons: You are **practiced** with light, medium, and heavy weapons and suffer no penalty when using any kind of weapon. Enabler.

Magic: You have an inability in crafting, understanding, and using magic.

Starting Equipment: You start with clothing, two weapons (or one weapon and a shield), one expensive item, two moderately priced items, and up to four inexpensive items. You also start with two cyphers (chosen for you by the GM) and 2 dollars.

If you start with a ranged weapon that requires ammunition (arrows, for example), you start with 12 of that type of ammunition. Before selecting your weapons, armor, and other gear, you might want to wait until after you've chosen your first-tier abilities, **descriptor**, and **focus**.

Abilities: You have a special talent for combat and can perform feats that others can barely imagine. Some abilities are constant, ongoing effects, and others are specific actions that usually cost points from one of your stat Pools. Choose four of the abilities described below. You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise.

🔴 **Control the Field (1 Might point):** This melee attack inflicts 1 less point of damage than normal, and regardless of whether you hit the target, you maneuver it into a position you desire within immediate range. Action.

🔴 **Danger Sense (1 Speed point):** Your **initiative** task is eased. You pay the cost each time the ability is used. Enabler.

🔴 **Don't Mind:** You are trained in Intellect defense tasks and have +2 Armor against damage that selectively targets your Intellect Pool (which normally ignores Armor). Enabler.

🔴 **Improved Edge:** Choose one of your Edge stats that is 0. It increases to 1. Enabler.

🔴 **Iron Fist:** When you make an unarmed attack (such as a punch or kick), it counts as a medium weapon instead of a light weapon. Enabler.

🔴 **Just a Scratch:** You ignore the **impaired** condition and treat the **debilitated** condition as impaired. Enabler.

🔴 **Lick (1 Might point):** This is a pummeling melee attack. Your attack inflicts 1 less point of damage than normal but dazes your target for one round, during which time all tasks it performs are hindered. Action.

🔴 **Physical Skills:** Choose two of the following skills in which you aren't already trained: balancing, climbing, jumping, running, or swimming. You are trained in these skills. Enabler.

🔴 **Practiced in Armor:** You can wear armor for long periods of time without tiring and can compensate for slowed reactions from wearing armor. You reduce the **Speed cost for wearing armor** by 1. You start the game with a type of armor of your choice. Enabler.

🔴 **Quick Throw (2 Speed points):** After using a thrown light weapon, you draw another light weapon and make another thrown attack against the same target or a different one. Action.

Initiative, 136

Impaired, debilitated: see damage track, page 141

Practiced, page 129

To lick something means to hit it with a weapon like a hammer or an axe.

Your character's starting equipment is as important as their starting skills. Learn more about what you carry and how it's used in Chapter 7: Goods and Currency.

Speed cost for wearing armor, page 124

Descriptor, page 62

Focus, page 83



☛ **Swipe (1 Speed point):** This is a quick, agile melee attack. Your attack inflicts 1 less point of damage than normal but dazes your target for one round, during which time all of its tasks are hindered. Action.

☛ **Trained Without Armor:** You are trained in Speed defense tasks when not wearing armor. Enabler.

☛ **Waylay (1 Intellect point):** You use a ranged weapon to target a limited area (such as a doorway, a hallway, or the eastern side of a clearing) and make an attack against the next viable target to enter that area. This works like a wait action, but you negate any benefit the target would have from cover, position, surprise, range, illumination, or visibility. Further, you inflict 1 additional point of damage with the attack. You can remain ready to waylay as long as you wish, within reason. Action.

☛ **Weapon Wielder:** You add +1 damage to one type of weapon attack of your choice: melee weapon attacks or ranged weapon attacks. Enabler.

SECOND-TIER PROTECTOR

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

☛ **Crushing Blow (2 Might points):** When you use a bashing or bladed weapon in both hands and apply Effort on the attack, you get a **free level of Effort** on the damage. (If fighting unarmed, this attack is made with both fists or both feet together.) Action.

☛ **Muscles of Iron (2 Might points):** For the next ten minutes, all Might-based actions other than attack rolls that you attempt are eased. If you already have this ability from another source, the effect of this ability lasts for one hour instead of ten minutes. Enabler.

☛ **Reload (1 Speed point):** When using a weapon that normally requires an action to reload, such as a heavy crossbow, you can reload and fire (or fire and reload) in the same action. Enabler.

☛ **Running Go (3 Might Points):** If you take down a foe, you can move a short distance, but only if you move toward another foe. You don't need to spend the points until you know that the first foe is down. Enabler.

☛ **Skill With Attacks:** Choose one category of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that category of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different category of attack. Enabler.

☛ **Skill With Defense:** Choose one category of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that category. Enabler.

☛ **Slow Bleed (2+ Might points):** You make a powerful and precise strike that inflicts additional damage later. On your next turn, the target of this attack takes an additional 3 points of damage (ignores Armor). The target can prevent this additional damage by making a recovery roll, using any ability that heals it, or using its action to attend to the injury. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase this ability's duration by one round. Action.

☛ **Successive Attack (2 Speed points):** If you take down a foe, you can immediately make another attack on that same turn against a new foe within your reach. The second attack is part of the same action. You can use this ability with melee attacks and ranged attacks. Enabler.

THIRD-TIER PROTECTOR

Third-tier Protectors have the following abilities:

Expert Cypher Use: You can bear three cyphers at a time.

Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different ability from a lower tier.

Free level of Effort, page 132



Protectors play a number of roles in the world. They might fight in order to get that chip off their shoulder, to prove their worth, to protect what matters, or just because they love the feel of getting down and dirty. Often, their prowess earns them respect, but if taken too far, it can have the opposite effect.

❖ **Deadly Aim (3 Speed points):** For the next minute, all ranged attacks you make inflict 2 additional points of damage. Action to initiate.

❖ **Experienced in Armor:** The cost reduction from your Practiced in Armor ability improves. You now reduce the Speed cost by 2. Enabler.

❖ **Fury (3 Might points):** For the next minute, all melee attacks you make inflict 2 additional points of damage. Action to initiate.

❖ **Lunge (2 Might points):** This ability requires you to extend yourself for a powerful stab or smash. The awkward lunge hinders the attack roll. If your attack is successful, it inflicts 4 additional points of damage. Action.

❖ **Parting Shot:** If a creature you attacked on your last turn with a melee attack uses its action to move out of immediate range, you gain an action to attack the creature as a parting blow, even if you have already taken a turn in the round. Enabler.

❖ **Seize the Moment (4+ Speed points):** If you succeed on a Speed defense roll to resist an attack, you gain an action. You can use the action immediately even if you have already taken a turn in the round. You don't take an action during the next round, unless you apply a level of Effort when you use Seize the Moment. Enabler.

❖ **Slice (2 Speed points):** This is a quick attack with a bladed or pointed weapon that is hard to defend against. You are trained in this task. If the attack is successful, it deals 1 less point of damage than normal. Action.

❖ **Trick Shot (2 Speed points):** As part of the same action, you make a ranged attack against two targets that are within immediate range of each other. Make a separate attack roll against each target. The attack rolls are hindered. Action.

❖ **Vigilance (2 Intellect points):** You take a cautious approach to combat, focusing more on protecting yourself than on hurting your opponents. While this ability is active, you gain an asset on Speed defense rolls against melee and ranged attacks, and your melee and ranged attacks are hindered. This effect lasts for as long as you wish, but it ends if no combat is taking place within range of your senses. Action to initiate.

FOURTH-TIER PROTECTOR

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

❖ **Amazing Effort:** When you apply at least one level of Effort to a noncombat task, you get a free level of Effort on that task. When you choose this ability, decide if it applies to Might Effort or Speed Effort. Enabler.

❖ **Capable Protector:** Your attacks deal 1 additional point of damage. Enabler.

❖ **Experienced Defender:** When wearing armor, you gain +1 to Armor. Enabler.

❖ **Feint (2 Speed points):** If you use an action to create a misdirection or diversion, in the next round you can take advantage of your opponent's lowered defenses. Make a melee attack roll against that opponent. You gain an asset on this attack. If your attack is successful, it inflicts 4 additional points of damage. Action.

You can't take Experienced in Armor as an ability if you haven't already taken Practiced in Armor.

Major effect, page 134

🔴 **Increased Effects:** You treat rolls of natural 19 as rolls of natural 20 for either Might actions or Speed actions (your choice when you gain this ability). This allows you to gain a **major effect** on a natural 19 or 20. Enabler.

🔴 **Momentum:** If you use an action to move, your next attack made using a melee weapon before the end of the next round inflicts 2 additional points of damage. Enabler.

🔴 **Practiced With All Weapons:** You become practiced with light, medium, and heavy weapons and suffer no penalty when using any kind of weapon. Enabler.

🔴 **Pry Open (4 Intellect points):** You tear apart the defenses of a creature within long range. Any magic-based defenses it has (such as a protection spell) are negated for 1d6 + 1 rounds. If the creature has no magic defenses, its Armor is reduced by 2 for one minute. If it has no magic-based defenses or Armor, attacks against it are eased for one minute. Action.

🔴 **Quick Kill (2 Speed points):** You know how to kill with speed. When you hit with a melee or ranged attack, you deal 4 additional points of damage. You can't make this attack in two consecutive rounds. Action.

🔴 **Snipe (2 Speed points):** If you spend an action aiming, in the next round you can make a precise ranged attack. You have an asset on this attack. If your attack is successful, it inflicts 4 additional points of damage. Action.

🔴 **Tough As Nails:** When you are impaired or debilitated on the **damage track**, Might-based tasks and defense rolls you attempt are eased. Each time you attempt to save yourself with this ability before your next ten-hour recovery roll, the task is hindered. Enabler.

FIFTH-TIER PROTECTOR

Fifth-tier Protectors have the following abilities:

Adroit Cypher Use: You can bear four cyphers at a time. Enabler.

Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🔴 **Improved Success:** When you roll a 17 or higher on an attack roll that deals damage, you deal 1 additional point of damage. For instance, if you roll a natural 18, which normally deals 2 extra points of damage, you instead deal 3 extra points. If you roll a natural 20 and choose to deal damage instead of achieving a special major effect, you deal 5 extra points of damage. Enabler.

🔴 **Jump Attack (5+ Might points):** You attempt a difficulty 4 Might roll to jump high into the air as part of your melee attack action. If you succeed at the jump and your attack hits, you inflict 3 additional points of damage and knock the foe prone. If you fail at the jump, you still make your normal attack roll, but you don't inflict the extra damage or knock down the opponent if you hit. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to enhance your jump; each level of Effort used in this way adds +2 feet (60 cm) to the height and +1 damage to the attack. Action.

🔴 **Mastery in Armor:** The cost reduction from your **Practiced in Armor** ability improves. You now reduce the Speed Effort cost for wearing armor to 0. Enabler.

🔴 **Mastery With Attacks:** Choose one category of attack in which you are trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are specialized in attacks using that category of weapon. Enabler. (If you aren't trained in an attack, select **Skill With Attacks** to become trained in that attack.) Enabler.

Practiced in Armor, page 27

You can't take Mastery in Armor as an ability if you haven't already taken Experienced in Armor.

Damage track, page 141

Ignore the Pain, page 47

A character can't apply Effort or other abilities to any task they accomplish using Tough As Nails.

Skill With Attacks, page 28

🔴 **Mastery With Defense:** Choose one category of defense task in which you are trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are specialized in defense tasks of that category. You can select this ability up to three times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different category of defense task. Enabler.

🔴 **Parry (5 Speed points):** You can deflect incoming attacks quickly. When you activate this ability, for the next ten rounds you ease all Speed defense rolls. Enabler.

SIXTH-TIER PROTECTOR

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🔴 **Again and Again (8 Speed points):** You can take an additional action in a round in which you have already acted. Enabler.

🔴 **Finishing Blow (5 Might points):** If your foe is prone, stunned, or somehow helpless or incapacitated when you strike, you inflict 7 additional points of damage on a successful hit. Enabler.

🔴 **Lethal Damage:** Choose one of your existing attacks that inflicts points of damage (depending on your type and focus, this might be a specific weapon, a special ability such as a blast of fire, or your unarmed attacks). When you hit with that attack, you inflict an additional 5 points of damage. Enabler.



Protectors are physical and action-oriented. They're more likely to overcome a challenge using force than by other means, and they often take the most straightforward path toward their goals. Of all the types, Protectors are usually the least directly involved with using magic, although some may have interesting abilities given by their focus.

🔴 **Magnificent Moment:** If you make an attack or attempt a task with the immediate action you gain by using **Seize the Moment**, the attack or task is eased. Enabler.

🔴 **Spin Attack (5+ Speed points):** You stand still and make attacks against up to five foes, all as part of the same action in one round. All of the attacks have to be the same sort of attack (melee or ranged). Make a separate attack roll for each foe. You remain limited by the amount of Effort you can apply on one action. Anything that modifies your attack or damage applies to all of these attacks. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the number of foes you can attack with this ability (one additional foe per level of Effort used in this way). Action.

🔴 **Weapon and Body (5 Speed points):** After making a melee weapon or ranged weapon attack, you follow up with a punch or kick as an additional attack, all as part of the same action in one round. The two attacks can be directed at different foes. Make a separate attack roll for each attack. You remain limited by the amount of Effort you can apply on one action. Anything that modifies your attack or damage applies to both attacks, unless it is tied specifically to your weapon. Action.

PROTECTOR EXAMPLE

Lurana wants to create a Protector character. She decides that the character is a Logger who is fast and strong, but not particularly smart or charismatic. For her background, she decides she had a big family, and all of her fighting skills are from scrapping with and protecting her younger siblings and cousins.

She puts 3 of her additional points into her Might Pool and 3 into her Speed Pool; her stat Pools are now Might 13, Speed 13, and Intellect 8. As a first-tier character, her Effort is 1, her Might Edge is 1, and her Speed Edge and Intellect Edge are both 0. She takes logging as her Protector area of knowledge.

Protectors can use any weapon without penalty, so Lurana chooses a hatchet (a medium weapon that inflicts 4 points of damage) and a heavy rifle (a heavy ranged weapon that inflicts 6 points of damage).

Seize the Moment, page 29

You can't take Magnificent Moment as an ability if you haven't already taken Seize the Moment.

Remember that at higher tiers, you can choose special abilities from lower tiers. This is sometimes the best way to ensure that you have exactly the character you want. This is particularly true with abilities that grant skills, which can usually be taken multiple times.

Trained Without Armor,
page 28

Weapon Wielder, page 28

Lick, page 27

Improved Edge, page 27
Defends What Matters,
page 93

Hotfoot powder, page 322

Molasses taffy, page 323

Develop a Bond, page 169
Scrappy, page 76

Lurana decides she doesn't wear armor, so for her first ability, she chooses **Trained Without Armor** to ease Speed defense tasks. For her second ability, she chooses **Weapon Wielder** and applies it to melee attacks so she can inflict extra damage with her hatchet.

Lurana expects to be doing a lot of close fighting, so she chooses **Lick**, which does less damage but lets her daze her target for a round. She rounds out her character with **Improved Edge**, increasing her Speed Edge to 1, so that she can be fast as well as tough.

As a Protector, Lurana can bear two cyphers. The GM determines that her first cypher is **hotfoot powder** (which lets her scare creatures away) and her second is **molasses taffy** (which eases an action by three steps).

Lurana still needs to choose a descriptor and a focus. For her descriptor, she chooses **Scrappy** because she imagines herself to be someone who pushes the limits

of what she can and should do. Scrappy gives her Nimble, which adds 4 points to her Speed Pool, raising it to 17. She gains Pressing Your Luck, which lets her succeed automatically on a task once a day or so. She also becomes trained in tasks that involve an element of chance.

Finally, Scrappy comes with an inability: Lurana is hindered in all tasks involving being sneaky and staying quiet.

For her focus, Lurana chooses **Defends What Matters**. This gives her training in Intellect defense tasks and initiative tasks. It also gives her training in persuasion and intimidation within her chosen community.

Not only is Lurana a tough Protector who jumps into the fray without hesitating, she's able to help those around her.

For her character arc, Lurana chooses **Develop a Bond** because she'd like to have a good friend to hang out with when she's not swinging her hatchet.



SAGE

Many people might think of you as a healer, but you're so much more than that. More than any other character type, you understand magic. No, not just understand. You breathe it. You bleed it. You touch it and it touches you. You and magic are connected and entwined in a way that goes beyond the understanding of most, and perhaps even yourself.

Maybe you were born with this gift, maybe you bargained for it, maybe you gained it through hard work and laborious study. Or maybe you have no idea where it came from. Whatever the reason for your connection, you can use it to accomplish incredible things—healing deep wounds, knowing impossible things, damaging creatures and objects, and even coming back to life after death.

Identity Suggestions: Bruja, Doctor, Folk Healer, Granny, Granny Witch, Healer, Layperson, Midwife, Nurse, Remedy Man, Root Doctor, Seer, Spell-Catcher, Student, Witch, Yarb Doctor

Individual Role: Sages are usually intelligent, learned, and insightful. They're able to naturally draw on the magic around them, but they're also schooled in the history and ways of magic use, and work to continually expand their knowledge and understanding. They often combine a wide variety of workings such as herbalism, crafting, and speaking words of power to connect to and use magic.

Group Role: Others look to Sages for protection, support, knowledge, and creative solutions to problems. Most likely a Sage won't be at the forefront of a fight—they're typically more physically vulnerable than others—but they usually have an ability or two that they can use to harm foes or keep their friends safe without getting into the fray.

Societal Role: Sages are highly regarded, as their unique abilities are recognized as being both powerful and useful. Of course, some people fear Sages or look upon them with suspicion, perhaps because they've heard whispered stories of Sages who abuse their gifts or use them for dark purposes.

Advanced Sages: Even at low tiers, Sage powers are impressive. Higher-tier Sages can accomplish amazing deeds that can reshape matter, bring inanimate objects to life, and bind powerful creatures.

SAGE PLAYER INTRUSIONS

You can spend 1 XP to use one of the following player intrusions, provided the situation is appropriate and the GM agrees.

Sudden Vision: A flash of insight provides you with a clear answer or suggests a course of action with regard to an urgent question, problem, or obstacle you're facing.

Nearby Presence: You sense a magical entity close to you, offering to lend a hand. They might ease your next ability, buy you some time, or protect you for a few rounds.

Magic Surge: A pulse of magic reactivates a cypher, artifact, or other magic item that was previously depleted, ruined, or inactive, causing it to do something that's useful to your current situation. Perhaps it harms a foe, creates a distraction, or lets you use it one more time for its original function.

SAGE STAT POOLS

Stat Pool	Starting Value
Might	7
Speed	9
Intellect	12

You get 6 additional points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish.

Yarb Doctors focus on finding and creating treatments and cures from herbs and other medicinal plants, such as ginseng, sheep sorrel, and sassafras, all mixed with a bit of magic.

People of all genders can identify as Grannies, Midwives, Remedy Men, and Witches.

SAGE BACKGROUND

Your type helps determine the connection you have to the setting. Roll a d20 or choose from the following list to determine a specific fact about your background that provides a connection to the rest of the world. You can also create your own background (or adjust these as you see fit).

d20 Background

- 1 You used to help your mamaw with healing when you were little, and eventually took over for her when she passed.
- 2 You've just always understood how to do the things you do. You've tried to teach others, but find you can't.
- 3 You once saved the life of a powerful person who came into town. They remain indebted to you.
- 4 You struggle to understand and master these abilities of yours, but it's important to you not to give up.
- 5 Your mom was a powerful Sage when she was alive, and many feared her. People are sometimes uneasy or trepidatious around you.
- 6 Your kin never did believe in magic or your abilities, but you were determined to follow your heart.
- 7 You learned about your abilities for the first time during a traumatic event, when you used them to save someone you deeply cared about.
- 8 Your kin sent you away to try to hide your abilities and keep you safe, but it didn't work.
- 9 You traveled a long way to study with a respected witch, and remain close to them.
- 10 You were left on someone's doorstep when you were a baby, and you don't know anything about your past.
- 11 You sometimes help the local businesses for free. In return, they offer you discounts and special treatment.
- 12 You once caught the attention of a dangerous entity while using your abilities, and you remain wary of drawing their gaze again.
- 13 You used to sneak into the local **craftivist** gatherings and listen to them talk about crafting and magic.
- 14 Your best friend is also a Sage. The two of you share discoveries and secrets whenever you get together.
- 15 You once seriously hurt someone you were trying to help. Sometimes the memory makes you hesitate to use your abilities.
- 16 You worked for years as a blacksmith's apprentice, but you weren't very good at it and decided to try something else.
- 17 Your sibling's a doctor in the big city, and when they come home, you share your knowledge with each other.
- 18 Your family owns a local business, and there's a lot of pressure for you to follow in their footsteps.
- 19 You learned your skills in a place far from here, where everything went by a different name.
- 20 You once had an encounter with a powerful entity. Afterward, you started noticing that you had abilities.

Craftivists use their skills to craft items, like quilts, that focus on subverting and dissenting against injustices such as slavery and patriarchy.

Many Sages call their abilities "gifts."

SAGE MAGIC

You might consider your magic to be God-given, nature-given, completely learned, completely innate, some combination of those, or something else entirely. Whatever your character believes is how their magic should work. They may not even call it "magic," and that's perfectly fine.

Most Sage abilities require at least one free hand to be used, and many also require words to be spoken, sung, written in the air, or signed. Depending on the ability and the character, they might use Bible verses, poems, or ancient sayings, or they might create something new for each situation.

FIRST-TIER SAGE

First-tier Sages have the following abilities:

Effort: Your Effort is 1.

Genius: You have an Intellect Edge of 1, a Might Edge of 0, and a Speed Edge of 0.

Expert Cypher Use: You can bear three cyphers at a time.

Starting Equipment: You start with appropriate clothing, plus two expensive items, two moderately priced items, and up to four inexpensive items of your choice.

Area of Knowledge: You are trained in one noncombat Sage-related area of knowledge in which you are not already trained. Choose one of the following: cooking, crafting, herbalism, reading, teaching, or writing. Enabler.

Magic: You are trained in two of the following: crafting, understanding, or using magic. You have an *inability* in whichever option you don't choose. Enabler.

Abilities: You have a special talent for harnessing and using magic, able to perform feats that others can barely imagine. Some abilities are constant, ongoing effects, and others are specific actions that usually cost points from one of your stat Pools. Choose three of the abilities described below. You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise.

☛ **Charmed Touch (1 Intellect point):** With a touch and a few chosen words, you restore 1d6 points to one stat Pool of any creature. This ability is a difficulty 2 Intellect task. Each time you attempt to heal the same creature, the task is hindered by an additional step. The difficulty returns to 2 after that creature rests for ten hours. Action.

☛ **Crafter:** You are trained in the crafting of two kinds of items. Enabler.

☛ **Create Deadly Poison (3+ Intellect points):** You create one dose of a level 2 herbal *poison* that inflicts 5 points of damage. You can apply this poison to a weapon, food, or drink as part of the action of creating it. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the level of the poison; each level of Effort used in this way increases the poison level by 1. If unused, the poison loses its potency after one hour. Action.

☛ **Draw Item (2 Intellect points):** A loose object within short range that you could carry in one hand is drawn to your free hand. If the object is stuck or held by another creature, you must succeed on a Might roll to rip it free, or the object remains where it is. Action.

☛ **Easy Forgetting (3 Intellect points):** You touch a creature and say the proper words to reach into their mind. With a successful Intellect roll, you erase up to the last five minutes of their memory. Action.

☛ **Foxfire (1 Intellect point):** You touch an object, and that object sheds light to illuminate everything in short range. The light remains until you use an action to touch the object again, or until you've illuminated more objects than you have tiers, in which case the oldest objects you illuminated go dark first. Action.

☛ **Hedge Magic (1 Intellect point):** You can perform small tricks: temporarily change the color or basic appearance of a small object, cause small objects to float through the air, clean a small area, mend a broken object, prepare (but not create) food, and so on. You can't use Hedge Magic to harm another creature or object. Action.

☛ **Living Off the Land:** Given an hour or so, you can always find edible food, usable herbs, and potable water in the wilderness. You can even find enough for a small group of people, if need be. Further, since you're so hardy and have gained resistance over time, you are trained in resisting the effects of natural poisons (such as those from plants or living creatures). You're also immune to natural diseases. Enabler.

☛ **Push (2 Intellect points):** You gather the magic from the world around you to push a creature or object an immediate distance in any direction you wish. You must be able to see the target, which must be your size or smaller, must not be affixed to anything, and must be within short range. The push is quick, and the force is too crude to be manipulated. For example, you can't use this ability to pull a lever or close a door. Action.

Inability, page 129

Poison, page 143

Damage track, page 141

Cautious Sages rely on Wrap. Depending on what you work out with your GM, your magical shield might be completely invisible, visible only when you're attacked, always visible as a faint glimmer surrounding you, or something else.

☛ **Restful Presence:** Creatures who make a recovery roll within short range of you add +1 to their roll. Enabler.

☛ **See the Unseen:** You automatically perceive creatures and objects that are normally invisible, insubstantial, or hidden via magic. When looking for things more conventionally hidden, the task is eased. Enabler.

☛ **Wrap:** The magic of the world wraps around you like a blanket. You have a shield of energy around you at all times that helps deflect attacks. You gain +1 to Armor. Enabler.

SECOND-TIER SAGE

Choose one of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire.

In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

☛ **Alleviate (3 Intellect points):** Using your skills, knowledge, and any items you have at hand, you attempt to cancel or cure one malady (such as disease or poison) in one creature. Action.

☛ **Create Debilitating Poison (3+ Intellect points):** You create one dose of a level 2 poison that hinders the poisoned creature's actions for ten minutes. You can apply this poison to a weapon, food, or drink as part of the action of creating it. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the level of the poison; each level of Effort used in this way increases the poison level by 1. If unused, the poison loses its potency after one hour. Action.

☛ **Fetch (3 Intellect points):** You cause a small object to disappear and reappear in your hands or somewhere else nearby. Choose one object that can fit inside a 5-foot (1.5 m) cube and that you can see within long range. The object vanishes and appears in your hands or in an open space anywhere you choose within immediate range. Action.

☛ **Heal and Soothe (3 Intellect points):**

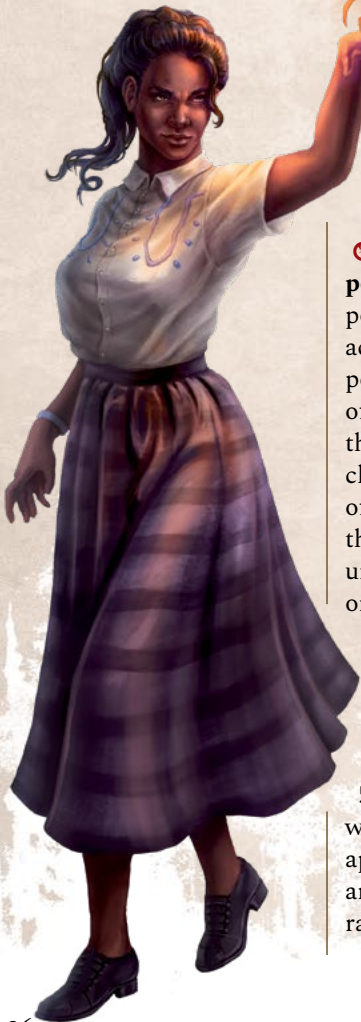
When you touch an impaired or debilitated character, you can move them up one step on the **damage track** (for example, a debilitated PC becomes impaired, and an impaired one becomes hale). Alternatively, if you use this ability on a PC during a rest, you grant them a +2 bonus to their recovery roll. Action.

☛ **Lock (2+ Intellect points):** A door, gate, chest, drawer, locket, or other object that can be closed within long range snaps shut and is magically locked (level 3 effect) for one hour. If an object or creature is physically holding the target object open, you must also succeed on an Intellect-based attack. For each level of Effort you apply, the quality of the magical lock increases by one level. Action to initiate.

☛ **Mind Reading (2 Intellect points):** You can read the surface thoughts of a creature within short range, even if the target doesn't want you to. You must be able to see your target. Once you have established contact, you can read the target's thoughts for up to one minute. If you also have the Mind Reading special ability from another source, you can use this ability at long range, and you don't need to be able to see the target (but you do have to know that the target is within range). Action to initiate.

☛ **Quick Bind (3 Intellect points):** You surround a foe of your size or smaller with scintillating energy, keeping it from moving or acting for one minute, as if frozen solid. You must be able to see the target, and it must be within short range. While bound, the target is impervious to harm, cannot be moved, and is immune to all effects. Action.

☛ **Quick Healing:** Thanks to a combination of herbs and magic, your ten-minute recovery roll takes only one action instead, so that your first two recovery rolls are one action, the third is one hour, and the fourth is ten hours. Enabler.





Ellie Walker moved around the hamstrung man quickly, etching a perfect circle in the red clay dirt around him. She had spent most of the night creeping through the edges of the yard, getting as close as she could to the men that man had changed, trying to find a sense if she could break his hold on them, undo whatever this working was, but it was no good. The best she could do was trace the threads of magic and pain back to the smear of crimson that followed that bastard in the fancy clothes wherever he went—it was the link to whatever power he was using to try to get into their house. All she needed was for him to step away from it for a breath. And lo, here he was, on his knees.

—Season 2, Episode 25: The Siege of Pleasant Evenings

🔴 **Retrieve Memories (3 Intellect points):**

You touch the remains of a recently killed creature and make an Intellect-based roll to restore its mind to life long enough to learn information from it. The GM sets the difficulty based on the amount of time that has passed since the creature died. A creature that has been dead for only a few minutes is a difficulty 2 task, one that has been dead for an hour is a difficulty 4 task, and one that has been dead for a few days is a difficulty 9 task. If you succeed, you awaken the corpse, causing its head to animate and perceive things as if it were alive. This enables communication for about one minute, which is how long it takes for the creature to realize that it's dead. The creature is limited to what it knew in life, though it cannot recall minor memories, only big events of importance to it. When the effect ends, or if you fail the roll, the creature's brain dissolves to mush and cannot be awakened again. Action.

🔴 **Slicing Strand (1 Intellect point):** You pull on a strand of magic in the world and use it to slice a single foe in short range, inflicting 4 points of damage. The strand is even more effective against immobile, nonliving targets, slicing up to 1 foot (30 cm) of any material that is level 3 or lower. The material can be up to 6 inches (15 cm) thick. Action.

🔴 **Trace the Threads (2 Intellect points):**

Choose a magical creature or object (or one that's used magic or had magic used on them). You are trained in all tasks involving following, hunting, finding, interacting with, and understanding them. You can choose only one magical quarry at a time. Action to initiate.

🔴 **Weapons:** You are **practiced** with light weapons and can use them without penalty. You have an **inability** with medium weapons and heavy weapons; your attacks with those weapons are hindered. Enabler.

Practiced, page 129

Inability, page 129

THIRD-TIER SAGE

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🔴 **Adroit Cypher Use:** You can bear four cyphers at a time. Enabler.

🔴 **Blood Ward (2 Intellect points):** You use your own blood to create a ward that reaches an immediate distance around your body. The first living creature that crosses the ward takes 5 points of damage and is stunned for one round and cannot act. Action to initiate.

🔴 **Comfort (4 Intellect points):** For the next ten minutes, your Wrap ability is bolstered and extended. In addition to providing you with +2 Armor, a person or creature that you designate gains +1 Armor. They must remain within short range of you. Enabler.

You can't take Comfort as an ability if you don't already have Wrap.



"And if you think you've actually crossed my wards—you're a bigger fool still." And with that, she smeared her hand across her bloody chest and pressed it to the cold earth of her yard. Something, somewhere thrummed and barriers of enormous power shot up around the Stag and Miss Dooley, trapping them together in a square of crimson light barely 12 feet across. The Stag reared.

"Blood wards, old boy. Your magic, not mine, but you were right when you said you could teach me things my Mas never could—oh, I learned plenty. I learned that you're a shadow of something much worse. I learned that you can be cut off from that something if you do it right." She watched the Stag's eyes go wide as it reached for power that was not there. "Aha! I think I did."

—Season 1, Episode 10: The Witch Queen Chapter III: Last Harbor

🔴 **Enhanced Intellect:** You gain 3 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

🔴 **Enhanced Intellect Edge:** You gain +1 to your Intellect Edge. Enabler.

🔴 **Got a Feeling (4 Intellect points):** You have an uncanny intuition when it comes to finding things. While exploring, you can extend your senses up to 1 mile (1.5 km) in any direction and ask the GM a very simple, general question—usually a yes-or-no question—about that area, such as “Are there Hollow Men nearby?” or “Is there ginseng in this area of the woods?” If the answer you seek is not in the area, you receive no information. Action.

🔴 **Slicing Skein (4 Intellect points):** When using your **Slicing Strand** ability, you can tangle multiple strands of magic, using them to slice all creatures within immediate range. Affected creatures take 4 points of damage. Action.

🔴 **Unbind (4 Intellect points):** You immediately end one ongoing magic effect (such as an effect created by a character ability) within immediate range. Alternatively, you can use this as a defense action to cancel any incoming ability targeted at you, or you can cancel any device or the effect of any device for 1d6 rounds. You must touch the effect or device to cancel it. Action.

🔴 **Weak Spot:** If a creature that you can see has a special weakness, such as a vulnerability to loud noises, a negative modification to perception, and so on, you know what it is. Ask and the GM will tell you; usually, this is not associated with a roll, but in certain cases the GM might decide that there is a chance for you not to know. In these cases, you are specialized in knowing creature weaknesses. Enabler.

🔴 **Wild Medicine (4 Intellect points):** Over the years, you’ve developed herbal remedies designed to work with your own biochemistry. Depending on which you imbibe, it makes you smarter, faster, or tougher, but when it wears off, the crash is a doozy, so you use it only in desperate situations. You gain 2 to your Might Edge, Speed Edge, or Intellect Edge for one minute, after which you can’t gain the benefit again for one hour. During this follow-up hour, every time you spend points from a Pool, increase the cost by 1. Action.

FOURTH-TIER SAGE

Choose one of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Slicing Strand, page 37

You can't take Slicing Skein as an ability if you don't already have Slicing Strand.

🔴 **Elemental Protection (4+ Intellect points):** You and every target you designate within immediate range gains +5 Armor against one type of specific damage (such as fire, cold, lightning, shadow, and so on) for one hour, or until you cast this spell again. Each level of Effort applied increases the elemental protection by +2. Action to initiate.

🔴 **Fire Bloom (4+ Intellect points):** Fire blooms within long range, filling an area 10 feet (3 m) in radius and inflicting 3 points of damage on all affected targets. Effort applied to one attack counts for all attacks against targets in the area of the bloom. Even on an unsuccessful attack, a target in the area still takes 1 point of damage. Flammable objects in the area might catch fire. Action.

🔴 **Fling (4 Intellect points):** You violently launch a creature or object about your size or smaller within short range and send it flying a short distance in any direction. This is an Intellect attack that inflicts 4 points of damage on the object being flung when it lands or strikes a barrier. If you aim the primary target at another creature or object (and succeed on a second attack), the secondary target also takes 4 points of damage. Action.

🔴 **Splatterment (4 Intellect points):** You tear apart the defenses of a creature within long range. Any magic-based defenses it has (such as a protective charm or the Wrap ability) are negated for 1d6 + 1 rounds. If the creature has no energy defenses, its Armor is reduced by 2 for one minute. If it has no energy-based defenses or Armor, attacks against it are eased for one minute. Action.

🔴 **Transgression (6+ Intellect points):** You control the actions of another creature you touch. This effect lasts for one minute. The target must be level 2 or lower. Once you have established control, you maintain mental contact with the target and sense what it senses. You can allow it to act freely or override its control on a case-by-case basis. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target or increase the duration by one minute. Thus,

to control the mind of a level 5 target (three levels above the normal limit) or control a target for four minutes (three minutes above the normal duration), you must apply three levels of Effort. When the duration ends, the creature doesn't remember being controlled or anything it did while under your command. Action to initiate.

FIFTH-TIER SAGE

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🔴 **Death Touch (6 Intellect points):** You gather magic into your skin and touch a creature. If the target is an NPC or a creature of level 3 or lower, it dies. If the target is a PC of any tier, they move down one step on the **damage track**. Action.

🔴 **Dust to Dust (7 Intellect points):** You disintegrate one object that is smaller than you and whose level is less than or equal to your tier. You must touch the object to affect it. If the GM feels it appropriate to the circumstances, you can disintegrate a portion of an object (the total volume of which is smaller than you) rather than the entire thing. Action.

🔴 **Expert Skill:** Instead of rolling a d20, you can choose to automatically succeed on a task you're trained in. The task must be difficulty 4 or lower, and it can't be an attack roll or a defense roll. Enabler.

🔴 **Greater Enhanced Intellect:** You gain 6 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

🔴 **Learning the Unknown (6 Intellect points):** By tapping into the magic around you, you can ask the GM one question and get a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. Gaining knowledge of the future is impossible. Action.

Damage track, page 141

A character might discover that Life After is both a blessing and a curse, because relying on it too much leads to a kind of malaise that vitality alone can't fix.

☛ **Life After:** Your ability to heal continues to function even if you die from violence, as long as your body is mostly intact. One minute after your death, this ability activates and brings you back to life; however, you come back with a permanent 2-point reduction in your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

☛ **Master Cypher Use:** You can bear five cyphers at a time. Enabler.

☛ **Read the Signs (4 Intellect points):** You examine an area and learn precise, useful details about the past (if any exist). You can ask the GM up to four questions about the immediate area; each requires its own roll. Action.

☛ **Slag Storm (5 Intellect points):** Small items on the ground, such as pebbles, dirt, bits of metal, or other small objects, rise into the air around you to form a swirling cloud. The cloud extends out to immediate range, moves with you, and lasts for one minute. When it ends, all the materials fall to the ground around you. The cloud makes it harder for other creatures to attack you, giving you an asset on Speed defense rolls. In addition, while the cloud is around you, you can use an action to whip the material so that it abrades everything within immediate range, dealing 1 point of damage to each creature and object in the area. Action to initiate.

SIXTH-TIER SAGE

Choose one of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

☛ **Advanced Blood Ward (6 Intellect points):** You use your own blood to create a ward that reaches an immediate distance around your body. The next three living creatures that cross the ward take 5 points of damage and are stunned for one round and cannot act. Action to initiate.

☛ **Cypher's Gift:** Choose one cypher that you carry. It must have an effect that is not instantaneous. You destroy the cypher and gain its power, which functions for you continuously. You can choose a cypher when you gain this ability, or you can wait and make the choice later. However, once you usurp a cypher's power, you cannot later switch to a different cypher—the usurping ability works only once. Action to initiate.

☛ **Deadly Sigil (5+ Intellect points):** You call upon a great magic by scribing a symbol in the air with your fingers. The symbol pulses forth, attaching itself to a target you designate within long range. On a successful attack, the symbol inflicts 5 points of damage per round. The effect lasts until the creature removes the symbol via magic, moves out of long range, or transforms in some way (such as changing its shape, becoming ethereal, and so on). If you apply Effort to increase the damage, you deal 2 additional points of damage per level of Effort (instead of 3 points). Action.

☛ **Greater Charmed Touch (4 Intellect points):** You touch a creature and restore their Might Pool, Speed Pool, and Intellect Pool to their maximum values (or to full health if they are an NPC), as if they were fully rested. A single creature can benefit from this ability only once each day. Action.

☛ **Leave Me Be (6+ Intellect points):** You step outside of everything into a safe place until the start of your next turn. To you, a few seconds pass while you are alone in your safe place. To everyone else, you seem to vanish for a few seconds and reappear in the same place. While in this unreal state, you can use abilities or objects on yourself, but you can't perceive, interact with, or affect the rest of the world, and vice versa. Time-based effects already on you (like a poison that inflicts damage every round) are paused, but when this ability ends they resume as if no time had passed. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the duration; each level of Effort used in this way adds one round to how long you can step away. Enabler.

❖ **Vengeance (5 Intellect points):** When a creature attacks you using magic, you can attempt to turn their magic back on them on your next turn. A successful attack inflicts 7 points of damage. Action.

SAGE EXAMPLE

Creed wants to create a Sage who is well-rounded but leans into healing and protection. He calls himself a Folk Healer as his type and decides his background is that he helped his mamaw with her healing when he was little.

He puts 2 of his additional points into each stat Pool, giving him a Might Pool of 9, a Speed Pool of 11, and an Intellect Pool of 14. His Sage is smart and quick. He has an Intellect Edge of 1, a Might Edge of 0, and a Speed Edge of 0. As a first-tier character, his Effort is 1.

For his area of knowledge, he chooses herbalism and decides he's trained in crafting and using magic. He doesn't expect to use weapons too much, relying instead on his gifts, but he equips himself with a pocket knife that was his mamaw's and a walking stick with a sharpened end.

As his first-tier abilities, he picks **Charmed Touch**, which lets him heal his friends, and **Wrap**, which gives him a protective magic shield.

As a Sage, he can bear three cyphers. The GM gives him **crow baby**, which protects him from damage; a **rattlesnake conjure card**, which warns him of impending danger; and a **jag of luck**, which lets him reroll a failed roll without spending XP.

For his descriptor, Creed chooses **Uncanny**, because he wants a character who's got an unusual way of moving through the world. Uncanny gives him +2 to his Intellect Pool (raising the Pool to 16), training in perception, and an ability to act even when it's not his turn.

For his focus, Creed considers **Cures What Ails Ya** but decides it would make him overly focused on healing. Instead, he chooses **Fears No Haints**, which gives him a connection to ghosts, haints, and other spirits.

Creed has a good-sized Intellect Pool to draw from and an Intellect Edge of 1, both of which will be useful for his various gifts. In addition, he can draw on his unique way of interacting with the world and his connections with spirits to gain knowledge and support.

For his character arc, Creed chooses **Finish a Great Work**. He has an unfinished book from his mamaw that's full of healing tips, recipes, and wisdom that he'd like to complete and publish in her name.

Charmed Touch, page 35

Wrap, page 36

Crow baby, page 319

Conjure card (rattlesnake), page 319

Jag of luck, page 322

Uncanny, page 81

Cures What Ails Ya, page 92

Fears No Haints, page 97

Finish a Great Work, page 171



EXPLORER

You're someone of action and physical ability, fearlessly facing the unknown. You prefer to be on the go, exploring strange and dangerous places, and discovering new things. This means you're physical but also knowledgeable about the various experiences you have and the places you visit. And, as you like to say, you have definitely seen some things.

Unlike some of the others you spend time with, magic's not really your thing. It might be something you tap into from time to time without realizing it, but you don't necessarily wield, use, or understand it. Explorers who wish to add that to their characters should consider taking a magic-based focus, such as one that allows you to **interact with animals** or **speak in tongues**.

Identity Suggestions: Caver, Book Woman, Boomer, Firefighter, Frontiersman, Hunter, Librarian, Miner, Mountain Ranger, Mountaineer, Publisher, Reporter, Scientist, Seeker, Teacher, Traveler, Wanderer, Woodsman, Writer

Individual Role: Although Explorers can be academics or well studied, they are first and foremost interested in action. They face up to grave dangers and terrible obstacles as a routine part of life.

Group Role: Explorers sometimes work alone, but far more often they prefer to spend time with others. The Explorer frequently leads the way, blazing the trail. However, they're also likely to stop and investigate anything intriguing they stumble upon.

Societal Role: Not all Explorers are out traipsing through the wilderness or poking about an unexplored caving system. Sometimes they're more interested in sharing their challenging experiences and hard-won knowledge as teachers, newspaper publishers, or reporters.

Advanced Explorers: Higher-tier Explorers gain more skills, some combat options, and a number of abilities that allow them to deal with danger. In short, they become more and more well rounded, able to deal with any challenge.

EXPLORER PLAYER INTRUSIONS

You can spend 1 XP to use one of the following player intrusions, provided the situation is appropriate and the GM agrees.

Lucky Landmark: Just when it seems like the path is lost (or you are), a trail marker, a landmark, or simply the way the terrain or corridor bends, rises, or falls away suggests to you the best path forward, at least from this point.

Weak Strain: The poison or disease turns out not to be as debilitating or deadly as it first seemed, and inflicts only half the damage that it would have otherwise.

Fortuitous Failure: A trap or a dangerous bit of machinery malfunctions before it can affect you.

EXPLORER STAT POOLS

Stat	Pool Starting Value
Might	10
Speed	9
Intellect	9

You get 6 additional points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish.

FIRST-TIER EXPLORER

First-tier Explorers have the following abilities:

Effort: Your Effort is 1.

Physical Nature: You have a Might Edge of 1, a Speed Edge of 0, and an Intellect Edge of 0.

Cypher Use: You can bear two cyphers at a time.

Starting Equipment: Appropriate clothing and a weapon of your choice, plus two expensive items, two moderately priced items, and up to four inexpensive items.



*Calls Home the Hounds,
page 87*

Speaks in Tongues, page 113

*Book Women are librarians
who traveled from town to
town to deliver books on
horseback in the early 1900s.
A Book Woman can be any
gender you choose.*

*Although Explorers can be
academics or well studied,
they are first and foremost
interested in action. They
face up to grave dangers and
terrible obstacles as a routine
part of life.*

EXPLORER BACKGROUND

Your type helps determine the connection you have to the setting. Roll a d20 or choose from the following list to determine a specific fact about your background that provides a connection to the rest of the world. You can also create your own background (or adjust these as you see fit).

d20 Background

- 1 When you were young, you spent a lot of time traveling to new places with your grandparents.
- 2 You've visited lots of places but there's one place in particular you still want to see before you die.
- 3 Your uncle's the publisher of a well-respected newspaper, and you occasionally help him out.
- 4 You started working in the coal mines when you were young. Now you try to keep all your exploring aboveground.
- 5 Your favorite sibling was killed in the woods by an unknown creature. You hope to one day avenge them, or at least discover what happened.
- 6 You spend a lot of time in a neighboring town, and many people there treat you as family.
- 7 There's a year of your life that you can barely remember, but sometimes in your dreams you see shadowy figures and hear eerie noises that seem familiar.
- 8 Nobody knows you used to run moonshine, but once in a while you run across someone you knew back in that life.
- 9 Your best friend from when you were a kid is now the head of the local union.
- 10 The best time of your life was the years you spent controlling wildfires. An injury forced you out of that life.
- 11 You dream of becoming a Book Woman someday, but you're afraid of horses.
- 12 You came of age in a wild place and are used to living rough.
- 13 Your dad died of mysterious circumstances. No one talks about it, but you know that he worked for some dangerous and powerful people.
- 14 You left to study elsewhere a few years ago, and no one—most of all you—thought you'd ever come back.
- 15 You've got duties here, but you wish you didn't. There's so much out there to see.
- 16 You served in the military with honor.
- 17 You worked with a troupe of traveling musicians and performers when you were younger. Perhaps you miss that life, or are happy that you left it behind.
- 18 You stumbled upon something unspeakable a few years ago. You've never talked about it, but you carry that moment with you always.
- 19 You were a teacher for many years and once saved some of your students from an unnatural storm. Most of them come back to see you from time to time.
- 20 Your mom used to talk to the woods. You were scared and fascinated by her abilities.



Practiced, page 129

Inability, page 129

Area of Knowledge: You are trained in one noncombat Explorer-related area of knowledge in which you are not already trained. Choose one of the following: caving, firefighting, mapping, mining, moonshining, railroading, riding, writing. Enabler.

Weapons: You are **practiced** with light and medium weapons and can use them without penalty. You have an **inability** with heavy weapons; your attacks with those weapons are hindered.

Magic: You have an inability in crafting, understanding, and using magic.

Special Abilities: You have a variety of abilities that make you a well-rounded character, able to quickly change tacks when needed. Some abilities are constant, ongoing effects, and others are specific actions that usually cost points from one of your stat Pools. Choose four of the abilities listed below. You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise.

❶ **Block (3 Speed points):** You automatically block the next melee attack made against you within the next minute. Action to initiate.

❷ **Critter Companion:** A level 1 creature accompanies you and follows your instructions. This creature is no larger than a large cat (about 20 pounds, or 9 kg) and is normally some sort of domesticated species. You and the GM must work out the details of your creature, and you'll probably make rolls for it in combat or when it takes actions. The critter companion acts on your turn. As a level 1 creature, they has a target number of 3 and 3 health, and they inflicts 1 point of damage. Its movement is based on its creature type (avian, swimmer, and so on). If your critter companion dies, you can search an urban or wild environment for 1d6 days to find a new companion. Enabler.

❸ **Danger Sense (1 Speed point):** Your initiative task is eased. You pay the cost each time the ability is used. Enabler.

❹ **Decipher (1 Intellect point):** If you spend one minute examining a piece of writing or code in a language you don't understand, you can make an Intellect roll of difficulty 3 (or higher, based on the complexity of the language or code) to get the gist of the message. Action to initiate.

❺ **Endurance:** Any duration dealing with physical actions is either doubled or halved, whichever is better for you. For example, if the typical person can hold their breath for thirty seconds, you can hold it for one minute. If the typical person can march for four hours without stopping, you can do so for eight hours. In terms of harmful effects, if a poison paralyzes its victims for one minute, you are paralyzed for thirty seconds. The minimum duration is always one round. Enabler.

❻ **Find the Way:** When you apply Effort to a navigation task because you don't know the way, are lost, are attempting to blaze a new route, need to choose between two or more otherwise similar paths, or something very similar, you can apply a **free level of Effort**. Enabler.

❼ **Fleet of Foot (1+ Speed points):** You can move a short distance as part of another action. You can move a long distance as your entire action for a turn. If you apply a level of Effort to this ability, you can move a long distance and make an attack as your entire action for a turn, but the attack is hindered. Enabler.

❽ **Improved Edge:** Choose one of your Edge stats that is 0. It increases to 1. Enabler.

❾ **Iron Fist:** When you make an unarmed attack (such as a punch or kick), it counts as a medium weapon instead of a light weapon. Enabler.

❿ **Know Thy Neighbor (2 Intellect points):** If you've invested yourself in a community and have spent at least a few months living there, you can learn things about it through a variety of methods. Sometimes contacts slip the information to you. Other times, you're able to draw conclusions simply by what you can see and hear. When you use this ability, you can ask the GM one question about the community and get a very short answer. Action.

Free level of Effort, page 132



Your character can choose any type of natural or supernatural creature as their companion, from a red squirrel to a red dog.

Red dog, page 372

Red squirrels are more commonly known as pine squirrels, chickaree, or mountain boomers in Appalachia.

🔴 **Living Off the Land:** Given an hour or so, you can always find edible food and potable water in the wilderness. You can even find enough for a small group of people, if need be. Further, since you're so hardy and have gained resistance over time, you are trained in resisting the effects of natural poisons (such as those from plants or living creatures). You're also immune to natural diseases. Enabler.

🔴 **Muscles of Iron (2 Might points):** For the next ten minutes, all Might-based actions (other than attack rolls) that you attempt are eased. If you already have this ability from another source, the effect of this ability lasts for one hour instead of ten minutes. Enabler.

🔴 **Practiced in Armor:** You can wear armor for long periods of time without tiring and can compensate for slowed reactions from wearing armor. You reduce the **Speed cost for wearing armor** by 1. You start the game with a type of armor of your choice. Enabler.

🔴 **Practiced With Heavy Weapons:** You become practiced with heavy weapons and suffer no penalty when using them. Enabler.

🔴 **Skilled Doing:** You are trained in two physical skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: balancing, climbing, jumping, riding, running, or swimming. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

🔴 **Skilled Exploring:** You are trained in two additional skills in which you are not already trained. Choose from the following: navigation, perception, sensing danger, initiative, peacefully opening communications with strangers, and tracking. Enabler.

🔴 **Skilled Learning:** You are trained in two noncombat skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two areas of knowledge such as history, geography, language, mythology, and so on. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

🔴 **Slip Into Shadow (2+ Intellect points):** You attempt to slip away from a selected target and hide from view in a nearby shadow, behind a tree or a furnishing, or in the next room, even if in full view of the target. For each level of Effort applied, you can attempt to affect one additional target, as long as all your targets are next to each other. Action to initiate.

🔴 **Trained Without Armor:** You are trained in Speed defense tasks when not wearing armor. Enabler.

🔴 **Wilderness Explorer:** While taking any action (including fighting) in the natural world, you ignore any penalties due to natural causes such as tall grass, thick brush, rugged terrain, weather, and so on. Enabler.

SECOND-TIER EXPLORER

Choose four of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🔴 **Curious:** You're always curious about your surroundings, even on a subconscious level. Whenever you use Effort to attempt navigation, perception, or initiative tasks in an area that you've only rarely or never visited before, you can apply an additional free level of Effort. Enabler.

🔴 **Danger Instinct (3 Speed points):** If you are attacked by **surprise**, whether by a creature, a device, or simply an environmental hazard (such as a tree falling on you), you can move an immediate distance before the attack occurs. If moving prevents the attack, you are safe. If the attack can still potentially affect you—if the attacking creature can move to keep pace, if the attack fills an area too big to escape, and the like—the ability offers no benefit. Enabler.

🔴 **Enable Others:** You can use the **helping** rules to provide a benefit to another character attempting a physical task. Unlike the normal helping rules, this doesn't require you to use your action to help the other character. It requires no action on your part. Enabler.

Speed cost for wearing armor, page 124

Surprise, page 144

Helping, page 150

🔴 **Escape (2 Speed points):** You slip your restraints, squeeze through the bars, break the grip of a creature holding you, pull free from sucking quicksand, or otherwise get loose from whatever is holding you in place. Action.

🔴 **Eye for Detail (2 Intellect points):** When you spend five minutes or so thoroughly exploring an area no larger than a short distance in diameter, you can ask the GM one question about the area. The GM must answer you truthfully. You cannot use this more than one time per area per day. Action to initiate; five minutes to complete.

🔴 **Foil Danger (2 Intellect points):** You negate one source of potential danger related to one creature or object that you are aware of within immediate distance for one round. This could be a weapon or device held by someone, a trap triggered by a pressure plate, or a creature's natural ability (something special, innate, and dangerous, like a cobra's venom). You can also try to foil a foe's mundane action (such as an attack with a weapon or claw) so the action isn't made this round. Make your roll against the level of the attack, danger, or creature. Action.

🔴 **Hand to Eye (2 Speed points):** This ability provides an asset to any tasks involving manual dexterity, such as pickpocketing, lockpicking, games involving agility, and so on. Each use lasts up to a minute; a new use (to switch tasks) replaces the previous use. Action to initiate.

🔴 **Learning the Path (2 Intellect points):** You observe or study a creature, object, or location for at least one round. The next time you interact with it (possibly in the following round), a related task (such as persuading the creature, attacking it, or defending from its attack) is eased. Action.

🔴 **Nature of the Beast:** You are trained in the lore of flesh-eating, nonhumanoid creatures—recognizing them, knowing their weaknesses, and knowing their habits and behaviors. Enabler.

🔴 **Quick Recovery:** Your second recovery roll (usually requiring ten minutes) is only a single action. Enabler.

🔴 **Range Increase:** Ranges for you increase by one step. Immediate becomes short, short becomes long, long becomes very long, and very long becomes 1,000 feet (300 m). Enabler.

🔴 **Skill With Defense:** Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

🔴 **Skilled Knowing:** You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: perception, identifying, lockpicking, assessing danger, seeing through deception, or sleight of hand. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

🔴 **Skilled Traveling:** You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: navigation, riding, running, swimming, boating, or vehicle driving. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

🔴 **Something in the Road:** When you use a vehicle as a weapon, you inflict 5 additional points of damage. Enabler.

🔴 **Soothe the Savage (2 Intellect points):** You calm a nonhuman beast within 30 feet (9 m). You must speak to it (although it doesn't need to understand your words), and it must see you. It remains calm for one minute or for as long as you focus all your attention on it. The GM has final say over what counts as a nonhuman beast, but unless some kind of deception is at work, you should know whether you can affect a creature before you attempt to use this ability on it. Very intelligent creatures, including those of the Green and Inner Dark, never count. Action.



🔴 **Stand Watch (2 Intellect points):** While standing watch (mostly remaining in place for an extended period of time), you unfailingly remain awake and alert for up to eight hours. During this time, you are trained in perception tasks as well as stealth tasks to conceal yourself from those who might approach. Action to initiate.

THIRD-TIER EXPLORER

Third-tier Explorers have the following abilities:

🔴 **Expert Cypher Use:** You can bear three cyphers at a time. Enabler.

🔴 **Abilities:** Choose two of the following abilities (or an ability from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different ability from a lower tier.

🔴 **Controlled Fall:** When you fall while you are able to use actions and within reach of a vertical surface, you can attempt to slow your fall. Make a Speed roll with a difficulty of 1 for every 20 feet (6 m) you fall. On a success, you take half damage from the fall. If you reduce the difficulty to 0, you take no damage. Enabler.

🔴 **Flex Skill:** At the beginning of each day, choose one task (other than attacks or defense) on which you will concentrate. For the rest of that day, you're trained in that task. You can't use this ability with a skill in which you're already trained to become specialized. Enabler.

🔴 **Ignore the Pain:** You ignore the **impaired** condition and treat the **debilitated** condition as impaired. Enabler.

🔴 **Knowledge Is Power:** Choose two noncombat skills in which you are not trained. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

🔴 **Look and Listen:** You are trained in listening and spotting things. In addition, most of the time, the GM should alert you if you're about to walk into an ambush or a trap that is lower than level 5. Enabler.

🔴 **Obstacle Running (3 Speed points):** For the next minute, you can ignore obstacles that slow your movement, allowing you to travel at normal speed through areas with rubble, fences, tables, and similar objects that normally you would have to climb over or move around. This movement might include sliding on a railing, briefly running along a wall, or even stepping on a creature to boost yourself over something. If an obstacle would normally require a Might or Speed task to overcome, such as swinging on a rope, balancing on a rope, or jumping over a hole, you are trained in that task. Enabler.

🔴 **Resilience:** You have 1 point of Armor against any kind of physical damage, even physical damage that normally ignores Armor. Enabler.

🔴 **Run and Fight (4 Might points):** You can move a short distance and make a melee attack that inflicts 2 additional points of damage. Action.

🔴 **Seize the Moment (4+ Speed points):** If you succeed on a Speed defense roll to resist an attack, you gain an action. You can use the action immediately even if you have already taken a turn in the round. You don't take an action during the next round, unless you apply a level of Effort when you use Seize the Moment. Enabler.

🔴 **Skill With Attacks:** Choose one category of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that category of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different category of attack. Enabler.

🔴 **Stone Breaker:** Your attacks against objects inflict 4 additional points of damage when you use a melee weapon that you wield in two hands. Enabler.

🔴 **Think Your Way Out:** When you wish it, you can use points from your Intellect Pool rather than your Might Pool or Speed Pool on any noncombat action. Enabler.

You can decide where your character's Armor comes from if you take Resilience. Perhaps you've got naturally tough skin after working in the mines for so long, or maybe you were given a bit of magic protection from an old friend.

Impaired and debilitated: see damage track, page 141

If your character has an ability that gives you passive knowledge, such as Look and Listen, it's okay to remind your GM about it so that they don't forget.

🔴 **Trapfinder (3+ Intellect points):** You find any traps (like a floor that would give way beneath you) or mechanical triggers to a trap or defense system that might pose a threat. You can do this without setting them off and in lieu of making a roll to find them. This ability can find traps of level 4 or below. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the level of traps that can be found by 2, so using two levels of Effort can find all traps of level 8 or below. Action.

🔴 **Wrest From Chance:** If you roll a natural 1 on a d20, you can reroll the die. If you reroll, you avoid a GM intrusion—unless you roll a second 1—and might succeed on your task. Once you use this ability, it is not available again until after you make a ten-hour recovery roll. Enabler.

FOURTH-TIER EXPLORER

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🔴 **Bypass Barrier (6+ Intellect points):** You get past a door, force field, or other barrier up to 3 feet (1 m) thick that is blocking your way. Depending on the barrier, this might involve finding a weak spot you can push through, luckily pressing the right button, or an unexpected interaction with cyphers you carry. The difficulty of the task is the level of

the barrier. This ability allows you alone to pass through, not anyone else, and the way through closes at the end of your turn (which might mean you're trapped on the far side). You have an asset in any attempts to get through it again. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use it to increase the maximum thickness of the barrier, each level of Effort adding 3 feet (1 m). Action.

🔴 **Capable Warrior:** Your attacks deal 1 additional point of damage. Enabler.

🔴 **Expert Skill:** Instead of rolling a d20, you can choose to automatically succeed on a task you're trained in. The task must be difficulty 4 or lower, and it can't be an attack roll or a defense roll. Enabler.

🔴 **Increased Effects:** You treat rolls of natural 19 as rolls of natural 20 for either Might actions or Speed actions (your choice when you gain this ability). This allows you to gain a **major effect** on a natural 19 or 20. Enabler.

🔴 **Read the Signs (4 Intellect points):** You examine an area and learn precise, useful details about the past (if any exist). You can ask the GM up to four questions about the immediate area; each requires its own roll. Action.

🔴 **Runner:** Your standard movement increases from short to long. Enabler.

🔴 **Subtle Steps:** When you move no more than a short distance, you can move without making a sound, regardless of the surface you move across. Enabler.

🔴 **Tough As Nails:** When you are impaired or debilitated on the **damage track**, Might-based tasks and defense rolls you attempt are eased. If you also have **Ignore the Pain**, make a difficulty 1 Might defense roll when you reach 0 points in all three of your Pools to immediately regain 1 Might point and avoid dying. Each time you attempt to save yourself with this ability before your next ten-hour recovery roll, the task is hindered. Enabler.

Major effect, page 134

Damage track, page 141
Ignore the Pain, page 47



FIFTH-TIER EXPLORER

Fifth-tier Explorers have the following abilities:

Adroit Cypher Use: You can bear four cyphers at a time. Enabler.

Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

☛ **Dark Explorer:** You ignore penalties for any action (including fighting) in extremely dim light or in cramped spaces. If you also have the *Eyes Adjusted* ability, you can act without penalty even in total darkness. You are trained in sneaking tasks while in dim or no light. Enabler.

☛ **Effective Skill:** Choose one noncombat skill when you gain this ability. You get a *minor effect* with that skill when you roll a natural 14 or higher (the d20 shows “14” or more). You get a major effect with that skill when you roll a natural 19 or higher (the d20 shows “19” or higher). You can select this ability more than once. Each time you select it, you must choose a different noncombat skill. Enabler.

☛ **Free to Move:** You ignore all movement penalties and adjustments due to terrain or other obstacles. You can fit through any space large enough to fit your head. Tasks involving breaking free of bonds, a creature’s grip, or any similar impediment gain three *free levels of Effort*. Enabler.

☛ **Group Friendship (4 Intellect points):** You convince a sentient creature to regard you (and up to ten creatures that you designate within immediate distance of you) positively, as they would a potential friend. Action.

☛ **Hard to Kill:** You can choose to reroll any defense task you make, but never more than once per round. Enabler.

☛ **Impart Understanding:** Your *Learning the Path* ability works more effectively, allowing you to ease a task by two steps or to provide two assets to a friend’s task, instead of easing normally. Enabler.

☛ **Jump Attack (5+ Might points):** You attempt a difficulty 4 Might roll to jump high into the air as part of your melee attack action. If you succeed at the jump and your attack hits, you inflict 3 additional points of damage and knock the foe prone. If you fail at the jump, you still make your normal attack roll, but you don’t inflict the extra damage or knock down the opponent if you hit. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to enhance your jump; each level of Effort used in this way adds 2 feet (60 cm) to the height and +1 damage to the attack. Action.

☛ **Mastery With Defense:** Choose one type of defense task in which you are trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You become specialized in defense tasks of that type. You can select this ability up to three times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of defense task. Enabler.

☛ **Parry (5 Speed points):** You can deflect incoming attacks quickly. When you activate this ability, for the next ten rounds you ease all Speed defense rolls. Enabler.

☛ **Physically Gifted:** Any time you spend points from your Might Pool or Speed Pool on an action for any reason, if you roll a 1 on the associated die, you reroll, always taking the second result (even if it’s another 1). Enabler.

☛ **Using the Environment (4 Intellect points):** You find some way to use the environment to your advantage in a fight. For the next ten minutes, attack rolls and Speed defense rolls are eased. Action to initiate.

SIXTH-TIER EXPLORER

Choose three of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

☛ **Again and Again (8 Speed points):** You can take an additional action in a round in which you have already acted. Enabler.

Eyes Adjusted, page 95

Minor effect, page 133

Free level of Effort, page 132

Learning the Path, page 46

You can’t take Impart Understanding as an ability if you don’t already have Learning the Path.

Practiced in Armor, page 45



Decipher, page 44

Find the Way, page 44

Skilled Exploring, page 45

Recovery rolls, page 142

*Trained Without Armor,
page 45*

Witch bottle, page 328

Mending mud, page 323

Skeptical, page 77

*Makes a High Lonesome
Sound, page 103*

Teach, page 177

❖ **Mastery in Armor:** The cost reduction from your **Practiced in Armor** ability improves. You now reduce the Speed cost for wearing armor to 0. Enabler.

❖ **Mastery With Attacks:** Choose one category of attack in which you are trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are specialized in attacks using that category of weapon. Enabler. (If you aren't trained in an attack, select Skill With Attacks to become trained in that attack.)

❖ **Negate Danger (7 Intellect points):** You permanently negate a source of potential danger related to one creature or object within immediate distance. This could be a weapon or device held by someone, a creature's natural ability, or a trap triggered by a pressure plate. Action.

❖ **Rapid Recovery:** You can make most **recovery rolls** faster than normal. You can make your one-action recovery roll as part of another action or when it isn't your turn, your ten-minute recovery roll takes you only one action, and your one-hour recovery roll takes you only ten minutes (your ten-hour rest is unchanged). If you make a recovery roll when it isn't your turn, until the end of your next turn all of your tasks are hindered. Enabler.

❖ **Share Defense:** If your training in a defense task is greater than that of an ally within short range, your advice and insight allow them to substitute your training for that defense task. Enabler.

❖ **Spin Attack (5+ Speed points):** You stand still and make attacks against up to five foes, all as part of the same action in one round. All of the attacks have to be the same sort of attack (melee or ranged). Make a separate attack roll for each foe. You remain limited by the amount of Effort you can apply on one action. Anything that modifies your attack or damage applies to all of these attacks. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the number of foes you can attack with this ability (one additional foe per level of Effort used in this way). Action.

EXPLORER EXAMPLE

Cricket decides to create an Explorer character—more specifically, a Book Woman who spends a lot of time traveling from town to town. She fell in love with books because her uncle publishes a newspaper and she grew up helping him out.

Cricket puts 3 additional points into her Might Pool, 2 into her Speed Pool, and 1 into her Intellect Pool; her stat Pools are now Might 13, Speed 11, and Intellect 10. As a first-tier character, her Effort is 1, her Might Edge is 1, and her Speed Edge and Intellect Edge are 0. Her character is fairly well-rounded so far.

She chooses riding as her area of knowledge, because she figures she's spent a lot of time on horseback, and she carries a hunting knife.

For abilities, Cricket chooses **Decipher**, which lets her get the gist of messages she might not otherwise understand, and **Find the Way**, which helps her navigate new places. From **Skilled Exploring**, she chooses two skills: peacefully opening communications with strangers and sensing danger. Lastly, she takes **Trained Without Armor** so that she's trained in Speed defense when she's not wearing armor.

Cricket can carry two cyphers at a time. The GM decides that one is a **witch bottle** that captures a supernatural being, and the other is **mending mud** that helps repair an object.

Cricket still needs a descriptor and focus.

Looking through the descriptor options, she chooses **Skeptical**, because she's an *X-Files* fan and thinks it would be fun to play a questioning character. This brings her Intellect Pool to 12 and gives her training in identifying as well as seeing through tricks and illusions. Overall, **Skeptical** lets her look at the world with curiosity and intelligence.

For her focus, Cricket chooses **Makes a High Lonesome Sound**, which lets her tell stories and be entertaining. She is now trained in all positive social interactions and can aid her friends' recovery rolls.

As a character arc, Cricket chooses **Teach**. She loves her work, but she's been doing it a long time and feels ready to teach someone else so that they can take over for her someday.

SPEAKER

People say you've got a magic tongue—and maybe it's true. You're good with words and good with people. You talk your way past challenges and out of jams, and you get others to do what you want.

Your abilities might be natural—a keen understanding of others combined with that sweet silver tongue of yours—or they might come to you by other, more uncertain means. Either way, you know a little about magic, at least compared to some other folks you spend time with, but not so much that you'd go bragging about it (probably).

Identity Suggestions: Actor, Company Man, Foreman, Lawyer, Mayor, Musician, Pastor, Politician, Preacher, Salesperson, Storyteller, Teacher, Union Boss

Individual Role: Speakers are smart and charismatic. They understand what makes people tick and, while Speakers use that knowledge for good, a few give in to the temptation to use their power for selfish reasons. Whatever their intentions, Speakers get those around them to do what needs to be done.

Group Role: The Speaker is often the face of the group, the person who speaks for all and negotiates with others. Combat and action are not a Speaker's strong suits, so other characters sometimes have to defend the Speaker in times of danger.

Societal Role: Speakers usually hold a position of some power in society, whether that's as the preacher of a large church, a successful salesperson, or the leader of the local union.

Advanced Speakers: Higher-tier speakers use their abilities to control and manipulate others, as well as aid and nurture their friends. They can talk their way out of danger and even use their words as weapons.

SPEAKER PLAYER INTRUSIONS

You can spend 1 XP to use one of the following player intrusions, provided the situation is appropriate and the GM agrees.

Friendly NPC: An NPC you don't know, someone you don't know that well, or someone you know but who hasn't been

particularly friendly in the past chooses to help you, though doesn't necessarily explain why. Maybe they'll ask you for a favor in return afterward, depending on how much trouble they go to.

Perfect Suggestion: A friendly NPC suggests a course of action with regard to an urgent question, problem, or obstacle you're facing.

Unexpected Gift: An NPC hands you a physical gift you were not expecting. It helps put the situation at ease if things seem strained, or provides you with a new insight into the context of the situation if there's something you're failing to understand or grasp.

SPEAKER STAT POOLS

Stat	Pool Starting Value
Might	8
Speed	9
Intellect	11

You get 6 additional points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish.

FIRST-TIER SPEAKER

First-tier Speakers have the following abilities:

Effort: Your Effort is 1.

Genius: You have an Intellect Edge of 1, a Might Edge of 0, and a Speed Edge of 0.

Cypher Use: You can bear two cyphers at a time.

Starting Equipment: Appropriate clothing and a light weapon of your choice, plus two expensive items, two moderately priced items, and up to four inexpensive items.

Area of Knowledge: You are trained in one noncombat Speaker-related area of knowledge in which you are not already trained. Choose one of the following: business, education, language, law, leadership, music, or religion. Enabler.

Magic: You are trained in one of the following: understanding or using magic. You have an inability in crafting magic as well as in whichever option you don't choose.

Your character's starting equipment is as important as their starting skills. Learn more about what you carry and how it's used in Chapter 7: Goods and Currency.

SPEAKER BACKGROUND

Your type helps determine the connection you have to the setting. Roll a d20 or choose from the following list to determine a specific fact about your background that provides a connection to the rest of the world. You can also create your own background (or adjust these as you see fit).

d20 Background

- 1 Your whole family has musical talent, but you seem to have none. Instead, you taught yourself to tell jokes and engaging stories.
- 2 You're quite the salesman. For now, you work at the local store, but you have dreams of owning your own business someday.
- 3 You've worked in the mines your whole life, but you have dreams of becoming a teacher.
- 4 You're sweet on someone who barely takes notice of you. You practice your social skills regularly in the hope of catching their ear and eye.
- 5 As a kid, you never spoke because of a stutter. Now that you've embraced the way you sound, no one's going to shut you up again.
- 6 You write poems in a secret notebook that you always carry with you. You hope to someday have them published.
- 7 You don't know if you believe in religion, but you've always loved getting up in front of people at church and having them listen to you.
- 8 You used to act in a traveling theater troupe, and they remember you fondly.
- 9 Your dad used to tell you stories of unimaginable creatures he'd encountered. He swore they were true, but you're not so sure.
- 10 You used to run with a group of people who used their skills to con others out of their money and goods. You're still trying to make amends for that.
- 11 You have an annoying rival who always seems to get in your way and foil your plans.
- 12 You lost your job for trying to stand up for the people you worked with. Your former coworkers still help you out when they can.
- 13 You like your moonshine, and you've developed a reputation for telling amazing tales after a couple of drinks.
- 14 Your mamaw was an amazing healer, and she once told you that much of her power was in the way she spoke to people. You've never forgotten that.
- 15 A company or organization you belong to recently put you in a position of power. You didn't really want it, but you're doing your best to fill the role.
- 16 You're in a close romantic relationship with someone in a powerful position.
- 17 Someone out there is telling your stories and pawning them off as their own. You've never met the culprit, but you'd certainly like to.
- 18 You once got a couple of people involved in a bad business deal. You didn't know it was bad, but they don't believe you.
- 19 When you were a kid, you got lost in a cave and were rescued by a creature made of shadows. You've never told that story, because you know people won't believe you.
- 20 You spent a lot of time in the woods as a kid, mostly talking to trees and plants. You were surprised to discover those skills you developed work just as well with people.



The Speaker dressed as a man would for a Sunday service, if he were delivering it while digging a ditch. He wore thick brown work pants, held up by wide suspenders over a dingy white button-up dress shirt with the sleeves rolled to the elbows. He wore boots like a soldier might. His sandy hair was cut short and parted on the side and falling to the right to the nape of his neck. His skin was the freckled bronze of a fair-skinned child allowed to become a tanned hide in the sun. Every head in attendance bowed as the Speaker knelt and scooped up a handful of soil and held it to the sun, as if to judge its content and color, and asked the gathered number, "Kinfolk, how does the Dark Earth find you?"

—Season 2, Episode 20: Am I Born to Die?

Weapons: You are practiced with light weapons and can use them without penalty. You have an inability with medium and heavy weapons; your attacks with those weapons are hindered.

Abilities: You have a special talent for communication that allows you to interact with others in unique and powerful ways. Some abilities are constant, ongoing effects, and others are specific actions that usually cost points from one of your stat Pools. Choose four of the abilities listed below. You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise.

♥ **Anecdote (2 Intellect points):** You can lift the spirits of a group of creatures and help them bond together by entertaining them with an uplifting or pointed anecdote. For the next hour, those who pay attention to your story are trained in a task you choose that's related to the anecdote, as long as it's not an attack or defense task. Action to initiate; one minute to complete.

♥ **Bewitch (1 Intellect point):** While talking, you grab and keep another creature's attention, even if the creature can't understand you. For as long as you do nothing but speak (you can't even move), the other creature takes no actions other than to defend itself, even over multiple rounds. If the creature is attacked, the effect ends. Action.

♥ **Community Connection:** When speaking to others in a community you have a strong connection to, you are trained in persuasion and intimidation tasks about topics that directly relate to the community. Enabler.

♥ **Dialect:** After hearing or seeing (in the case of sign language) a language spoken for a few minutes, you can speak it and make yourself understood. If you continue to use the language to interact with native speakers, your skills improve rapidly, to the point where you might be mistaken for a native speaker after just a few hours of speaking the new language. Enabler.

♥ **Encouragement (1 Intellect point):** While you maintain this ability through ongoing inspiring oration, your allies within short range ease one of the following task types (your choice): defense tasks, attack tasks, or tasks related to any skill that you are trained or specialized in. Action.

♥ **Fast Talk (1 Intellect point):** When speaking with an intelligent creature who can understand you and isn't hostile, you convince that creature to take one reasonable action in the next round. A reasonable action must be agreed upon by the GM; it should not put the creature or its allies in obvious danger or be wildly out of character. Action.

♥ **Friendly Advice (1 Intellect point):** You know your friends' strengths and weaknesses, and how to motivate them to succeed. When you give an ally a suggestion involving their next action, the character is trained in that action for one round. Action.

♥ **Hear Me Now (2 Intellect points):** You project confidence, knowledge, and charisma to all who see you for the next hour. Your demeanor is such that those who see you automatically understand that you are someone important, accomplished, and with authority. When you speak, strangers who are not already attacking give you at least a round to have your say. If speaking to a group that can understand you, you can attempt to have them produce their leader or ask that they take you to their leader. You gain a **free level of Effort** that can be applied to one persuasion task you attempt during this period. Action to initiate.

♥ **Inspire Aggression (2 Intellect points):** Your words twist the mind of a character within short range who is able to understand you, unlocking their more primitive instincts. As a result, they gain an asset on their Might-based attack rolls for one minute. Action to initiate.

If you give a Rebellious character a suggestion using an ability like Friendly Advice, they are trained if they do the opposite of your suggestion. You might not know this the first time you try to help them, but you'll soon figure it out.

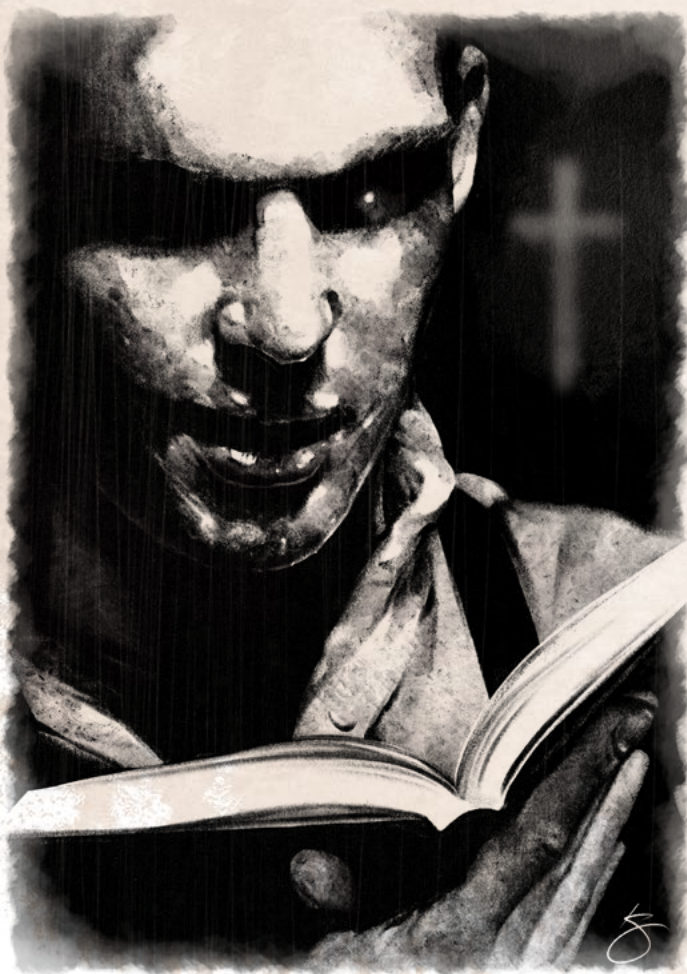
Rebellious, page 75

To have a PC become allied with a community, the player and the GM should work together to create a backstory for the relationship. In addition, a community might welcome the PC as a friend through roleplaying. To create a new connection, you might consider a character arc (page 162) such as Find Your Family or Join an Organization.

Free level of Effort, page 132

❖ **Powerful Rhetoric (1 Intellect point):** After engaging a creature in conversation for at least a minute, you can attempt to influence how that creature is perceived, promoting it as a friend, dismissing it as a fool, or denouncing it as a foe. Your words are so well chosen that even you and it are affected, because your conviction and its doubt are paramount. The accuracy of your assessment isn't important as long as you keep up the rhetoric. From then on (or until you change your rhetoric or the creature offers a convincing defense to those who've heard your label), the friend's social interactions gain an asset, the fool's social interactions are hindered, or the foe's defenses are hindered. Action.

❖ **Practiced With Medium Weapons:** You become practiced with light and medium weapons and can use them without penalty. If you wield a heavy weapon, attacks with it are hindered. Enabler.



❖ **Shake the Bones (1 Intellect point):** Your words are so powerful, they cause the bones of a creature to shudder and shake, inflicting 2 points of Might damage and 2 points of Intellect damage. Your target must be able to hear and understand you (or at least understand the gist of what you're saying). Action.

❖ **Skilled Talking:** You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: deceiving, persuasion, public speaking, seeing through deception, or intimidation. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

❖ **Spin Identity (2+ Intellect points):** You convince all intelligent creatures who can see, hear, and understand you that you are someone or something other than who you actually are. You don't impersonate a specific individual known to the victim. Instead, you convince the victim that you are someone they do not know belonging to a certain category of people. "We're from the labor union." "I'm just a simple drifter." "Your mamaw sent me."

A disguise isn't necessary, but a good disguise will almost certainly be an asset to the roll involved. If you attempt to convince more than one creature, the Intellect cost increases by 1 point per additional victim. Fooled creatures remain so for up to an hour, unless your actions or other circumstances reveal your true identity earlier. Action.

❖ **Terrifying Presence (2+ Intellect points):** You convince one intelligent target of level 3 or lower that you are its worst nightmare. The target must be within short range and be able to understand you. For as long as you do nothing but speak (you can't even move), the target is paralyzed with fear, runs away, or takes some other action appropriate to the circumstances. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to terrorize a level 5 target (two levels above the normal limit), you must apply two levels of Effort. Action.

♥ **Trained Without Armor:** You are trained in Speed defense tasks when not wearing armor. Enabler.

SECOND-TIER SPEAKER

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

♥ **A Smile and a Word:** When you use Effort on any action involving interactions—even those having to do with calming animals or communicating with someone or something whose language you do not speak—you gain a **free level of Effort** on the task. Action.

♥ **Ask Around (2 Intellect points):** When in a group of people (a caravan, a store, a village, a market, and so on), you can ask around about any topic you choose and come away with useful information. You can ask a specific question, or you can simply obtain general facts. You also get a good idea of the general layout of the location involved, note the presence of all major sites, and perhaps even notice obscure details. For example, not only do you find out if anyone in the market has seen the missing boy, but you also get a working knowledge of the layout of the market itself, note all the entrances and which are used more often than others, and notice that everyone seems to avoid the southeastern entrance for some reason. Action to initiate; about an hour to complete.

♥ **Calm Stranger (2+ Intellect points):** You can cause one intelligent creature to remain calm as you speak. The creature doesn't need to speak your language, but it must be able to see you. It remains calm as long as you focus all your attention on it and it is not attacked or otherwise threatened. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to calm additional creatures allied with your initial target, one additional creature per level of Effort applied. Action.

♥ **Contrary to Belief (2+ Intellect points):** Using your clever words and knowledge of others, you can attempt to alter the narrative so that a target of up to level 3 within short range becomes uncertain of their conviction in one simple area, such as their conviction that you just stole something from their store or their belief that they've never met you before. This effect usually lasts only for the period of time you spend speaking, and perhaps up to a minute longer, before the target realizes their error. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the target level that can be affected. Afterward, all your tasks to persuade or otherwise socially interact with the target are hindered. Action.

♥ **Damper (1 Intellect point):** You hinder all actions attempted by any number of targets within short range who can understand you. You choose which targets are affected. Affected targets' actions are hindered for one round. Enabler.

♥ **Inspire Action (4 Intellect points):** If one ally can see and easily understand you, you can instruct them to take an action. If they take that exact action, they can do so as an additional action immediately. Doing so doesn't interfere with the ally taking a normal action on their turn. Action.

♥ **Practiced in Armor:** You can wear armor for long periods of time without tiring and can compensate for slowed reactions from wearing armor. You reduce the **Speed cost for wearing armor** by 1. You start the game with a type of armor of your choice. Enabler.

♥ **Skill With Defense:** Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

♥ **Speedy Recovery (3 Intellect points):** Your words enhance the normal regenerative ability of a character within short range who is able to understand you. When they make a recovery roll, they must spend only half the normal amount of time required to do so (minimum one action). Action.

Free level of Effort, page 132

Speed cost for wearing armor, page 124

Speakers can communicate using body language, facial expressions, and gestures as well as words.

A Speaker with Discerning Mind has practiced swaying the minds of others so much that they've gained a measure of protection against others attempting the same on them.

When a character uses Spin a Yarn, ask the player to provide a broad overview of what their character is doing—the story they're telling, the song they're singing, and so on—that is so amazing that others are inspired.

*Bewitch, page 53
Fast Talk, page 53*

🔴 **Spin a Yarn:** Through stories, songs, art, or other forms of entertainment, you inspire your friends. After spending 24 hours with you, once per day each of your friends can ease a task. This benefit is ongoing while you remain in the friend's company. It ends if you leave, but it resumes if you return to the friend's company within 24 hours. If you leave the friend's company for more than 24 hours, you must spend another 24 hours together to reactivate the benefit. Enabler.

🔴 **Sway (3 Intellect points):** In any gathering where two or more people are trying to establish the truth or come to a decision, you can sway the verdict with masterful rhetoric. If you are given a few rounds or more to argue your point, either the decision goes your way or, if someone else effectively argues a competing point, any associated persuasion or deception task is eased by two steps. Action to initiate; one or more rounds to complete.

🔴 **Unexpected Betrayal:** Within a round or two of successfully using **Bewitch**, **Fast Talk**, or a similar ability on a target within short range, the first attack you make on that target is eased by two steps. Once you use Unexpected Betrayal on a target, using your abilities or attempting simple persuasion on that target is permanently hindered by two steps. Enabler.

THIRD-TIER SPEAKER

Third-tier Speakers have the following abilities:

Expert Cypher Use: You can bear three cyphers at a time.

Abilities: Choose two of the following abilities (or an ability from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different ability from a lower tier.

🔴 **Canary:** You gain an informer within an allied community. They act as your secret (or known) informer. If something of note happens in your informer's location, they will use whatever means they have available to tell you what's happened. Work with your GM to decide the allied community as well as the informer. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different informer (they can be from the same or different communities). Enabler.

🔴 **Discerning Mind:** You have +3 Armor against damaging attacks and effects that target your mind and Intellect. Defense rolls you make against attacks that attempt to confuse, persuade, frighten, or otherwise influence you are eased. Enabler.

🔴 **Flamboyant Boast (1 Intellect point):** You boastfully describe an act that you will accomplish, and then as part of the same action, you attempt it. If an average person would find the action difficult (or impossible) and you succeed at it, creatures who witnessed it who are not your allies are potentially dazed on their next turn, and all tasks they attempt are hindered. The GM will help you determine whether your boast is something that would impress onlookers so significantly. If you attempt the task you boast about but fail to accomplish it, all your attempts to affect or attack onlookers who saw you are hindered for about ten minutes. Enabler.

🔴 **Good Talk:** You keep your allies on their toes with occasional questions, jokes, and even mock drills for those who care to join in. After spending 24 hours with you, your allies are treated as if trained in tasks related to perception. This benefit is ongoing while you remain in your allies' company. It ends if you leave, but it resumes if you return to their company within 24 hours. If you leave their company for more than 24 hours, you must spend another 24 hours together to reactivate the benefit. Enabler.

🔴 **Grand Deception (3 Intellect points):** You convince an intelligent creature that can understand you and isn't hostile of something that is wildly and obviously untrue. Action.

🔴 **Hasten (4+ Intellect points):** Your words imbue the spirit of a character within immediate range who is able to understand you, hastening them so they gain an asset on initiative tasks and Speed defense rolls for ten minutes. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to affect more targets; each level of Effort affects one additional target. You must speak to additional targets to hasten them, one target per round. Action per target to initiate.

🔴 **Hold Sway (4 Intellect points):** When speaking with a group of intelligent creatures that can understand you and aren't hostile, you convince them to take one reasonable action in the next round. A reasonable action should not put the creatures or their allies in obvious danger or be wildly out of character. Action.

🔴 **Perfect Stranger (3 Intellect points):** You alter your posture and way of speaking and make a small but real alteration to an outfit (such as putting on or taking off a hat, reversing a coat, and so on). For the next hour (or as long as you keep up the alteration), even creatures that know you well don't recognize you. All tasks related to hiding your true identity during this period gain one **free level of Effort**. Action to initiate.

🔴 **Quick Wits:** When performing a task that would normally require spending points from your Intellect Pool, you can spend points from your Speed Pool instead. Enabler.

🔴 **Telling (2 Intellect points):** This ability provides an asset to any tasks for attempting to deceive, persuade, or intimidate. Each use lasts up to a minute; a new use (to switch tasks) replaces the previous use. Action to initiate.

FOURTH-TIER SPEAKER

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🔴 **Confounding Banter (4 Intellect points):** You spew a stream of nonsense to distract a foe within immediate range. On a successful Intellect roll, your defense roll against the creature's next attack before the end of the next round is eased. Action.

🔴 **Crowd Protection (5 Intellect points):** While you're in a community or large group that you're allied with, members who are near you press close in a protective formation to keep you safe for about a minute. This crowd moves with you during this period, keeping an eye out for anything that might hurt you. When it ends, the crowd disperses and individuals go on about their business. The protective crowd makes it harder for other creatures to attack you, giving you an asset on Speed defense tasks. In addition, while the crowd is around you, you can use an action to exhort them to attack all enemies within short range, dealing 1 point of damage to each creature and object in the area. Action to initiate.

🔴 **Envoy (4 Intellect points):** If you interact with or study a target that lives within a community you're allied with for at least a round, you can attempt to convince them to become your envoy for a specific period or to deliver a specific message or object to another location. Distance does not matter as long as the location is somewhere your envoy can reach, either through their own means or through means you provide. The envoy delivers your message or physical parcel to the desired location, and then reports back on whether they succeeded or failed. Action to initiate; hours, days, weeks, or months to get a report back.

🔴 **Exile From Community (4 Intellect points):** If you are in a community you are allied with and you study a target for at least a round, you can attempt to convince them to leave the community, either permanently or for a specified period of time. The task is eased if a majority in the community believes that the target is a bad seed, troublemaker, criminal, or otherwise someone who makes things difficult for the community. Action to prepare; action to initiate.

🔴 **Feint (2 Speed points):** If you use one action creating a misdirection or diversion, in the next round you can take advantage of your opponent's lowered defenses. Make a melee attack roll against that opponent. You gain an asset on this attack. If your attack is successful, it inflicts 4 additional points of damage. Action.

Free level of Effort, page 132

Attempting to convince another creature to do something against their will, instincts, or better interest always requires a roll.

🗨️ **Heightened Skills:** You are trained in two tasks of your choosing (other than attacks or defense). If you choose a task you're already trained in, you instead become specialized in that task. You can't choose a task you're already specialized in. Enabler.

🗨️ **Interruption (4 Intellect points):** Your vociferous, booming command prevents a creature within short range from taking any action for one round. It can defend itself if attacked, but when it does so, its defense is hindered by two steps. Each additional time you attempt this ability against the same target, you must apply one more level of Effort than you applied on the previous attempt. Action.

🗨️ **Perceived Insult (4 Intellect points):** You know just where someone's soft spots are, and you use your words to hit them where it hurts most. You say something emotionally damaging to a target within long range that can understand you, dealing 6 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) per round. The psychosis can be dispersed if a target uses an action doing nothing but calming and centering itself. Action to initiate.

🗨️ **Scheme (6 Intellect points):** Having an action plan in place before facing a challenge improves the odds of success, even if that plan is eventually changed or discarded once it's put into play. If you and your allies spend at least ten minutes going over a plan of action, each of you gains one **free level of Effort** that can be applied to one task you attempt during the execution of that plan within the next 24 hours. The plan must be something concrete and executable in order to gain this benefit. Action to initiate; ten minutes to complete.

🗨️ **Spur Effort (5 Intellect points):** You select an ally within immediate range. If that character applies Effort to a task on their next turn, they can apply a free level of Effort on that same task. Enabler.

🗨️ **Suggestion (5+ Intellect points):** You suggest an action to a creature within immediate range. If the action is something that the target might normally do anyway, it follows your suggestion. If the suggestion is something that is outside of the target's nature or express duty (such as asking a guard to let an intruder pass), the suggestion fails. The creature must be level 2 or lower. The effect of your suggestion lasts for up to a minute.

In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target you can affect by 1. Thus, to affect a level 5 target (three levels above the normal limit), you must apply three levels of Effort.

When the effects of the ability end, the creature remembers following the suggestion but can be persuaded to believe that it chose to do so willingly. Action to initiate.

FIFTH-TIER SPEAKER

Fifth-tier Speakers have the following abilities:

🗨️ **Adroit Cypher Use:** You can bear four cyphers at a time. Enabler.

🗨️ **Abilities:** Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🗨️ **Encourage (6 Intellect points):** Your words encourage a target you touch who can understand you. The next action it takes is eased by three steps. Action.

🗨️ **Experienced in Armor:** The cost reduction from your Practiced in Armor ability improves. You now reduce the Speed cost for wearing armor by 2. Enabler.

🗨️ **Flee (6 Intellect points):** All non-allies within short distance who can hear your dreadful, intimidating words flee from you at top speed for one minute. Action.

🗨️ **Gift to a Friend (4 Intellect points):** You know just what to say to draw a little extra effort from an ally. This grants one creature you choose within short range an additional, immediate action, which it can take out of turn. The creature uses the additional action however it wishes. Action.

Free level of Effort, page 132

You can't take Experienced in Armor as an ability if you haven't already taken Practiced in Armor (page 55).

🔴 **Great Talk (7 Intellect points):** You keep your allies on their toes with occasional questions, jokes, and even mock drills for those who care to join in. After spending 24 hours with you, your allies can apply a free level of Effort to any initiative tasks they attempt. This benefit is ongoing while you remain in their company. It ends if you leave, but it resumes if you return to their company within 24 hours. If you leave their company for more than 24 hours, you must spend another 24 hours together to reactivate the benefit. You must spend the Intellect point cost each 24 hours you wish to keep the benefit active. Enabler.

🔴 **Group Friendship (4 Intellect points):** You convince a sentient creature to regard you (and up to ten creatures that you designate within immediate distance of you) positively, as they would a potential friend. Action.

🔴 **Restoration (6 Intellect points):** You restore points to a target's Might or Speed Pool in one of two ways: either the chosen Pool regains up to 6 points, or it is restored to a total value of 12. You make this decision when you initiate this ability. Points are regenerated at a rate of 1 point each round. You must remain within immediate range of the target the whole time, either touching them or conversing with them. In no case can this raise a Pool higher than its maximum. Action.

🔴 **Rouse to Violence (6+ Intellect points):** While in an allied community, you can spend an action rousing the ire of residents to a killing frenzy and then point out a target that the crowd can see. If you succeed and the target is a creature of level 3 or lower, the crowd kills it. If the target is a PC, they move down one step on the damage track. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target (each level of Effort used this way increases the target's maximum level by 1). Action to prepare; action to initiate.

🔴 **Skill With Attacks:** Choose one category of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that category of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different category of attack. Enabler.

🔴 **Yours to Command (3 Intellect points):** You issue a specific command to another character. If they choose to listen, any attack they attempt on their next turn is eased, and a hit deals 3 additional points of damage. If your command is to perform a task other than an attack, the task is eased as if it benefited from a free level of Effort. Action.

SIXTH-TIER SPEAKER

Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier) to add to your repertoire. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

🔴 **Assume Control (6+ Intellect points):** You control the actions of another creature you have interacted with or studied for at least a round. This effect lasts for ten minutes. The target must be level 2 or lower. Once you have assumed control, the target acts as if it wants to accomplish your desire to the best of its ability, freely using its own best judgment unless you use an action to give it a specific instruction on an issue-by-issue basis. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to attempt to command a level 5 target (three levels above the normal limit), you must apply three levels of Effort. When the effect ends, the target remembers everything that happened and reacts according to its nature and your relationship to it; assuming control might have soured that relationship if it was previously a positive one. Action to initiate.



The vegetative state created by Shatter Mind can be healed by advanced magic or science, or by a cypher that cures Intellect damage, such as blessed strings.

Blessed strings, page 316

Using Empty Vessel could gradually stain a character's soul, making them vulnerable to future temptations or evil creatures they might otherwise be able to ignore.

🔴 **Coax the Crowd (7 Intellect points):**

You convince a large number of people—all within long range—to change a belief and take a long-term action or set of actions. For example, you might convince them to identify the location of a local criminal that no one has previously been brave enough to act against, or you might convince them to welcome a group of outsiders as friends in the community. This takes ten minutes to accomplish, during which time you can't be seriously interrupted or the attempt automatically fails. Action.

🔴 **Crowd Control (6+ Intellect points):**

You control the actions of up to five creatures in short range. This effect lasts for one minute. All targets must be level 2 or lower. Your control is limited to simple verbal commands like "Stop," "Run away," "Follow that guard," "Look over there," or "Get out of my way." All affected creatures respond to the command unless you specifically command them otherwise. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the targets or affect an additional five people. Thus, to control a group that includes a level 4 target (two levels above the normal limit) or a group of fifteen people, you must apply two levels of Effort. When the Crowd Control ability ends, the creatures remember your commands but don't remember being controlled—your commands seemed reasonable at the time. Action to initiate.

🔴 **Empty Vessel (5+ Intellect points):**

Your attack is the utterance of a magic phrase or phrases so terrible that it pulls life from a living target within short range. The target must be level 1. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to kill a level 5 target (four levels above the normal limit), you must apply four levels of Effort. Action.

🔴 **Fight Fierce (4 Intellect points):**

As long as you use your action each round giving orders or advice, attack and defense tasks taken by your allies within short range are eased. Action.

🔴 **Hypnotic Speech (5 Intellect points):**

Whether they are lines you wrote, acted, reported on, or otherwise incorporated into your talent, you compose an oratory on the fly that is so wonderful that even you believe it. For each ally who hears it (and you too), a task attempted within the next hour is eased by two steps. Action.

🔴 **Inspiration (6 Intellect points):**

You speak words of encouragement and inspiration. All allies within short range who can hear you immediately gain a recovery roll, gain an immediate free action, and have an asset for that free action. The recovery roll does not count as one of their normal recovery rolls. Action.

🔴 **Shatter Mind (7+ Intellect points):**

Your harsh words reverberate destructively in the brain of an intelligent level 1 target within short range that can hear and understand you, causing enough emotional damage to trigger a vegetative state. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target. Thus, to shatter the mind of a level 5 target (four levels above the normal limit), you must apply four levels of Effort. Action.

🔴 **Will of a Leader (9 Intellect points):**

You harden your allies' dedication and capabilities. Each ally within immediate range gains +1 Edge to one stat of their choice for one hour. You also gain this benefit to one stat of your choice. Action.

🔴 **Word of Command (6 Intellect points**

+ level 6 cypher): You utter a word so powerful that to fully invest it, you sacrifice a cypher in your possession that is level 6 or higher. You issue the word to one creature within long range that you can see. The affected target must obey the command for several hours before it is free to act as it wishes. Targets that are attacked while under the effect of the command can defend themselves. Typical commands include "retreat," "calm," "come," and "stay." The GM decides how the target acts once a command is given. Action.

🔴 **Work Together (9 Intellect points):** If your allies can see and easily understand you, you can instruct each of them to take one specific action (the same action for all of them). If any of them choose to take that exact action, they can do so as an additional action immediately. This doesn't interfere with them taking their normal actions on their turns. Action.

SPEAKER EXAMPLE

Tipper wants to create a Speaker who used to get in a lot of trouble but who's trying to straighten up and run for office someday. For their background, they decide they used to run with a group of con artists, but they've long since left that life behind.

They put 3 of their additional stat points into their Intellect Pool and 3 into their Speed Pool; their stat Pools are now Might 8, Speed 12, and Intellect 14. As a first-tier character, their Effort is 1, their Might Edge and Speed Edge are 0, and their Intellect Edge is 1. They're smart and charismatic but not particularly tough.

Tipper chooses leadership as their Speaker area of knowledge and is skilled in using magic. They carry a letter opener in their bag. As a light weapon, it inflicts 2 points of damage.

For abilities, Tipper starts with **Fast Talk** and **Spin Identity**, thinking those are skills

they used in their former life. They also choose **Encouragement** to help their friends, and round out their first-tier abilities with **Skilled Talking** (public speaking and persuasion).

As a Speaker, Tipper starts with two cyphers. The GM determines that they have a **donkey's cross**, which cures disease, and **Granny's notebook**, which eases healing and gives them an extra recovery roll.

Tipper chooses **Driven** for their descriptor, because they want a character who is highly motivated to have a better future. Driven increases their Might Pool to 10 and gives them training in Intellect defense tasks. Each day, they can also choose a new skill to be trained in that will help them reach their goal. At first, Tipper is sad that their descriptor gives them an inability in perception tasks, but they decide to make it part of their story—their lack of perception is how they got caught in the first place, and that's what set them on this new path.

For their focus, Tipper chooses **Applies Themselves** because it furthers their goal of running for office. Now they have extra points in their Intellect Pool and are trained in solving problems with multiple solutions.

For their character arc, Tipper chooses the unusual **Fall From Grace**, because they fully expect their past to come back to haunt them just as they begin to succeed in their new goals.

Encouragement, page 53
Skilled Talking, page 54

Donkey's cross, page 319
Granny's notebook, page 321

Driven, page 68

Applies Themselves, page 84

Fall From Grace, page 170
Fast Talk, page 53
Spin Identity, page 54



"Empty vessel, hollow bone," came the voice of Marcie Walker from behind him. "By the words of my mother, and my mother's mother, and by all the strength of my ancestors, I bind you. By earth and by fire, by air and by water, I bind you. By blood and bone, sigil and thread, I bind you." The air around Erskine constricted, and on instinct, his amorphous form sought to escape, to dissipate like wood smoke, but he found himself trapped by an invisible wall measuring the circumference of the rug he stood upon—a mysterious ring he found he could not escape, and that ring was inexplicably shrinking. As Erskine frantically tried to escape, the space around him grew tighter and tighter, until the heavy desk groaned, cracked, and splintered as the unseen wall of force moved through it and him. The very air began to crush him, squeezing Erskine until he was a narrow column of smoke spinning wildly within the shrinking circle of will that his bladed hand could not break. He spun round and round until he faced the tall woman, who held a long walking stick with a silver tip that blazed with a purifying white light. Her voice did not thunder, nor scream; it was a low growl of focused fury and rage.

"Soot-breather. Bottom-feeder. Hollow Man of black breath made. I see you. I name you. I call you *lightless*. I call you *nothing*. I call you *gone*." And the circle closed on itself without a sound, and Abel Erskine, or what was left of him, tumbled to the ground in a small pile of ash that could easily be swept into a shoebox.

—Season 2, Episode 25: The Siege of Pleasant Evenings

Chapter 5:

CHARACTER DESCRIPTOR

Stealthy, page 78
Brash, page 63

Your descriptor defines your character—it flavors everything you do. The differences between a **Stealthy** Fighter and a **Brash** Fighter are considerable. The descriptor changes the way those characters go about every action. Your descriptor places your character in the situation (the first adventure, which starts the campaign) and helps provide motivation. It is the adjective of the sentence “I am an *adjective noun who verbs*.”

Inabilities, page 129

Descriptors offer a one-time package of extra abilities, skills, or modifications to your stat Pools. Not all of a descriptor’s offerings are positive character modifications. For example, some descriptors have **inabilities**—tasks that a character isn’t good at. You can think of inabilities as negative skills—instead of being one step better at that kind of task, you’re one step worse. If you become skilled at a task that you have an inability with, they cancel out. Remember that characters are defined as much by what they’re not good at as by what they are good at.

Descriptors also offer a few brief suggestions for how your character got involved with the rest of the group on their first adventure. You can use these, or not, as you wish.

Choose one of the descriptors in this chapter for your character. You can pick any descriptor you wish regardless of your type.

Some players might be hesitant to create a character that’s defined by a “negative” quality like Clumsy or Foolish, but in truth, even this kind of descriptor has enough advantages that it makes for capable and talented PCs. What negative descriptors really do is make more interesting and complex characters that are often great fun to play, and to play with.

Your descriptor matters most when you are a beginning character. The benefits (and perhaps drawbacks) that come from your descriptor will eventually be overshadowed by the growing importance of your type and focus. However, the influence of your descriptor will remain at least somewhat important throughout your character’s life.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTORS

Beholden	Hardy	Skeptical
Brash	Honorable	Skittish
Charming	Industrious	Smart
Clever	Loyal	Stealthy
Clumsy	Lucky	Stout
Creative	Mystical	Superstitious
Curious	Neighborly	Swift
Cursed	Offish	Tickled
Dishonorable	Outcast	Tongue-Tied
Driven	Perceptive	Uncanny
Educated	Rebellious	Uppity
Foolish	Scrappy	Vengeful
Graceful	Sharp-Eyed	
Gracious	Shifty	

BEHOLDEN

Long ago, you made a bargain—or someone made one for you. Or perhaps you just think you did. It matters not. What matters is that you feel beholden to some dark fate, some dangerous entity, some unknown force that seeks to bend you to its will. Nothing you do lets you escape it. Every choice you make, every action you take, you do with one eye on that which you believe you owe.

You gain the following characteristics:

Wary: +2 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: Always on the lookout for danger, you are trained in perception-related tasks.

Skill: You are defense minded, so you are trained in Speed defense tasks.

Skill: You are always expecting your obligation to come due. Thus, you are resistant to mental shocks. You are trained in Intellect defense tasks having to do with losing your sanity or equanimity.

Obligated: Every other time the GM uses a **GM intrusion** on your character, you can't refuse it and don't get an XP for it (you still get an XP to award to another player). This is because it's the result of the bargain you made (or think you made). There is no escaping it.

Additional Equipment: You carry a token of your bargain. Whether it's to keep you safe or remind you of the danger is up to you.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You suspect that the only hope you have of avoiding your fate might lie on this path.
2. You believe that being part of a group keeps you safer, so you joined up with this one for now.
3. One of the other PCs promised to help you learn more about your bargain if you helped the group out.
4. One of the other PCs has been family for a long time, and suggested you come along to take your mind off your worries.

BRASH

You have a hard time tamping down your enthusiasm. Why wait when you can just do it (whatever it is) and get it done? You deal with problems when they arise rather than plan ahead. Putting out the small fires now prevents them from becoming one big fire later. You are the first to take risks, to jump in and lend a hand, to step into dark passages, and to find danger.

Your impulsiveness likely gets you into trouble. While others might take time to study the items they discover, you use such items without hesitation. After all, the best way to learn what something can do is to use it. When a cautious explorer might look around and check for danger nearby, you have to physically stop yourself from bulling on ahead. Why fuss around when the exciting thing is just around the bend?

You gain the following characteristics:

Reckless: +2 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You're trained in **initiative** actions (to determine who goes first in combat).

Skill: You're trained in Speed defense tasks.

Inability: You'll try anything once, but quickly grow bored after that. Any task that involves patience, willpower, or discipline is hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You heard what the other PCs were up to and instantly decided to join them.
2. You pulled everyone together after you heard rumors about something interesting you wanted to see or do.
3. You blew all of your money and now find yourself strapped for cash.
4. You're in trouble for acting recklessly. You join the other PCs because they offer a possible way out of your problem.

Brash characters get into trouble. That's their thing, and that's fine. But if you're constantly dragging your fellow PCs into trouble (or worse, getting them seriously hurt or killed), that will be annoying, to say the least. A good rule of thumb is that impulsiveness doesn't always mean a predilection to do the wrong thing. Sometimes it's the urge to do the right thing.

*GM intrusion, page 162
Initiative, page 136*



CHARMING

You're a smooth talker and a charmer. You've got that "special something" that draws others to you, and you can convince others to do as you wish. You're likely physically attractive or highly charismatic, and others enjoy listening to your voice. You probably pay attention to your appearance, keeping yourself well groomed. You make friends easily. You play up the personality facet of your Intellect stat; intelligence is not your strong suit. You're personable, but not necessarily studious or strong-willed.

You gain the following characteristics:

Personable: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in all tasks involving positive or pleasant social interaction.

Resistant to Charms: You're aware of how others can manipulate and charm, and you notice when those tactics are used on you. Because of this awareness, you are trained in resisting any kind of persuasion or seduction if you wish it.

Contact: You have an important contact who is in an influential position, such as an important businessman, a small-town mayor, or the leader of an underground group. You and the GM should work out the details together.

Inability: You were never good at studying or retaining facts. Any task involving lore, knowledge, or understanding is hindered.

Inability: Your willpower is not one of your strong points. Defense tasks to resist mental attacks are hindered.

Additional Equipment: You've managed to talk your way into some decent discounts and bonuses in recent weeks. As a result, you

have enough coins jangling in your pocket to purchase a moderately priced item.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You met a total stranger (one of the other PCs) and charmed them so much that they invited you along.
2. You instigated the whole thing and convinced the others to join you.
3. The PCs were looking for someone else, but you convinced them that you were perfect instead.
4. You charmed yourself right into the wrong situation, group, or job—and this is it.

CLEVER

You're quick-witted, thinking well on your feet. There's little that gets by you. You understand others, so you can fool them but are rarely fooled. Because you easily see things for what they are, you quickly get the lay of the land, size up friends and foes, and see what's what pretty darn quick. Not everyone trusts you, though—more than a few believe you've gotten too big for your britches.

You gain the following characteristics:

Smart: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in all interactions involving lies or trickery.

Skill: You're trained in defense rolls to resist mental effects.

Skill: You're trained in all tasks involving identifying or assessing danger, lies, quality, importance, function, or power.

Inability: You were never good at studying or retaining trivial knowledge. Any task involving lore, knowledge, or understanding is hindered.

Additional Equipment: You see through the schemes of others and occasionally persuade them to believe you—even when, perhaps, they should not. Thanks to your clever behavior, you have an additional moderate item.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You convinced one of the other PCs to tell you what they were doing.



D.L. settled into her chair and turned on the charm. It was her own special gift—perhaps not as exciting as those of some of the Walker women, but it had served her well over the course of her career. You see, Douglass Walker was the kind of person people just loved to spill their secrets to. And she always knew if they spoke the truth.

—Season 2, Episode 19:
Where the Sun Never Shines

2. From afar, you observed that something interesting was going on.

3. You talked your way into the situation because you thought it might earn some money.

4. You are hiding from something or someone, and you lied your way into this situation.



And Jack just lived to have a good time and to get away with things and to scheme and to plan and to almost get caught. 'Cause Jack was clever and Jack was quick and Jack had done messed up real bad.

—Build Mama a Coffin, Episode 12:
Mr. J.T. Fields (of Dorchester)



CLUMSY

You'd be doing just fine if those feet of yours would keep out of your way. Or that bucket. Or that root, which definitely was not there a second ago. People have been telling you you'll grow out of your lack of grace forever, but you never have. You often drop things, trip over your own feet, or knock things (or creatures or other people) over. Some might get frustrated by this quality, but most find it funny and even a little charming.

You gain the following characteristics:

Butterfingers: -2 to your Speed Pool.

Thick-Muscled: +2 to your Might Pool.

Inelegant: You have a certain lovable charm. You are trained in all pleasant social interactions when you express a lighthearted, self-deprecating manner.

Dumb Luck: The GM can introduce a **GM intrusion** on you, based on your clumsiness, without awarding you any XP (as if you had rolled a 1 on a d20 roll). However, if this happens, 50 percent of the time, your clumsiness works to your advantage. Rather than hurting you (much), it helps you or it hurts your enemies. You slip, but it's just in time to duck an attack. You fall down, but you trip your enemies as you crash into their legs. You turn around too quickly, but you end up knocking the weapon from your foe's hand. You and the GM should work together to determine the details. If the GM wishes, they can use GM intrusions based on your clumsiness normally (awarding XP).

Skill: You've got a certain bull-like quality. You are trained in tasks involving breaking things.

Inability: Any task that involves balance, grace, or hand-to-eye coordination is hindered.

Additional Equipment: You carry a small broken item that you hope can someday be put back together.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You accidentally broke something of importance to one of the PCs; helping them with this is how you make amends.

2. Someone reached out to help you after you took a bad tumble. You became friends.

3. You discovered something interesting after falling down a hillside, and brought it to this group to learn more.

4. You stumbled into the PCs as they were discussing their mission, and they took a liking to you.

GM intrusion, page 24

CREATIVE

Maybe you have a journal where you write down ideas so you can develop them later. Perhaps you tell stories of wild creatures and wonders from the woods. Maybe you bend willow, bake bread, or draw everything you see. Or maybe you are moved by all that's around you to produce something beautiful and eternal.

However your gift works, you're creative—you write, make up songs, sculpt, paint, build, or otherwise create narratives that enthrall others with your vision.

You gain the following characteristics:

Inventive: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Original: You're always coming up with something new. You're trained in any task related to creating a narrative (such as a story, play, or scenario). This includes deception, if the deception involves a narrative you're able to tell.

Skill: You are naturally inventive. You are trained in one specific creative skill of your choice: writing, music, painting, drawing, and so on.

Skill: You love solving riddles and the like. You are trained in puzzle-solving tasks.

Skill: To be creative requires that you are always learning. You are trained in any task that involves finding out something new, such as when you're digging through a newspaper, archive, written work, or similar collection of knowledge.

Inability: You're inventive but not charming. All tasks related to pleasant social interaction are hindered.

Additional Equipment: You have a small pouch of materials that you use in your creative endeavors.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You're looking to learn new ways of creating and thought that spending time with the PCs would give you that opportunity.
2. You're gathering materials for a new project and convinced the PCs to bring you along.
3. A creative life is often one beset with financial hurdles. You joined the PCs because you hoped it would be profitable.
4. You think it's possible that one of the PCs might be your muse.

CURIOUS

The world is vast and mysterious, with wonders and secrets to keep you amazed for several lifetimes. You feel the tugging on your heart, the call to explore what's above and beneath, discover new friends, encounter new places, and find joy in whatever wild wonders you might find along the way. However, as strongly as you feel the pull to roam, you know there is danger aplenty, and you take precautions to ensure that you are prepared for any eventuality. Study, preparation, and the help of good friends might make it possible to see and do everything you want to do.

When not hitting the road and looking around, you spend your time with your nose in a book, learning everything you can about the place you're going so you know what to expect when you get there.

You gain the following characteristics:

Smart: +4 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You are eager to learn. You are trained in any task that involves learning something new, whether you're chatting with a local shopkeeper to get information or digging through old books to get to the bottom of something.

Skill: You have made a study of the world around you. You are trained in tasks involving geography or history.

Inability: You tend to focus on details, without truly paying attention to what's going on around you. Any task to hear or otherwise notice danger is hindered.

Inability: When you see something interesting, you wait to act until you learn as much as you can. Initiative actions (to determine who goes first in combat) are hindered.

Additional Equipment: You have three books on whatever subjects you choose.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You've always wanted to see the place where the other PCs are headed.
2. One of the PCs approached you to learn information related to the mission, having heard you were an expert.
3. You're fascinated by the knowledge that another PC seems to have. You'd love to talk with them more about it.
4. You think that spending time with this group will give you the opportunity to explore something brand new.

CURSED

You're never sure if your thoughts are your own. You often hear a voice or voices, guiding you and attempting to force your hand. Sometimes these voices are helpful and kind. Other times, not so much. Where do they come from, and are you cursed or blessed by them?

You gain the following characteristics:

Enchanted: +4 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You are trained in all tasks involving listening and hearing.

Insight: The voices have many things to tell you, and some of them are beneficial. Once after each ten-hour recovery roll, you can use a **player intrusion** without spending an XP.

Inability: The voices in your head are sometimes so loud it's hard to make sense of the real world. You have an inability in navigation, tracking, and identifying plants and animals.

Additional Equipment: You carry a small notebook where you sometimes write down what you hear.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You listened to one of your voices, which suggested that this would be a good thing to embark upon.
2. One of the other PCs sounds an awful lot like one of your voices, and you'd like to spend time with them to find out if there's a connection.
3. You have reason to believe that being with the other PCs could help you gain a better understanding of the thoughts and voices you hear.
4. You find that you can hear the voices more clearly when you're doing something active, and this seemed like a good fit.

DISHONORABLE

There is no honor among thieves—or betrayers, backstabbers, liars, or cheats. You are some or maybe even all of these things, and either you don't lose any sleep over it, or you deny the truth to others or to yourself. Regardless, you are willing to do whatever it takes to get your own way. Honor, ethics, and principles are merely words. In your estimation, they have no place in the real world.

You gain the following characteristics:

Sneaky: +4 to your Speed Pool.

Just Desserts: When the GM gives another player an experience point to award to someone for a GM intrusion, that player can't give it to you.

Skill: You are trained in deception.

Skill: You are trained in stealth.

Skill: You are trained in intimidation.

Inability: Most others don't like or trust you. Pleasant social interactions are hindered.

Additional Equipment: You have a small inexpensive item that you recently stole from someone.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You're interested in what the PCs are doing, so you lied to them to get into their group.
2. While skulking about, you overheard the PCs' plans and realized that you wanted in.
3. One of the other PCs invited you; you suspect they have no idea of what you're truly like.
4. You bullied your way in with intimidation and bluster.

Player intrusion, page 24



Robert Gibson was convinced he was cursed. Hell, he'd been told so when he was a boy. His daddy's daddy had killed a man in cold blood in the middle of the town proper and was hung for it. His daddy done the same thing in a bar fight when Robert was ten. Old lady out the church told him to his face that the Gibsons was "bad blood. Ain't never gonna be no count." She wasn't wrong...

—Season 2, Episode 13: The Dark Earth at Night

DRIVEN

When you choose Driven as your descriptor, choose a goal that is possible to attain. You might wish to find a lost family member, learn more about your own background, become an expert in something, or gain the funds to pay for a healer to treat a loved one. Once you achieve this goal, you may choose a new one. You can also tie your goal into your character arc.

Character arc, page 162

You have set your sights on a goal, and everything you do is in pursuit of that objective. The thing you seek defines you—it shapes your decisions, colors your outlook, and impels you to take action even when your body and mind scream for you to give up and set the task aside, at least for a while. No matter the hardships you face along the way, you believe in your purpose and will let nothing stop you from achieving it.

You probably talk about your mission all the time, bringing it up even when it's only tangentially connected to the conversation. You usually consider other pursuits in the context of whether or not it helps you reach your goal.

You gain the following characteristics:

Determined: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in Intellect defense tasks.

Skill: Each day, choose one skill that you believe will clearly help you reach your goal. You are trained in tasks related to that skill.

Inability: Your commitment to your goal makes it hard to relate to others who don't share your objectives or to notice things that don't pertain to your present mission. All perception tasks are hindered.

Additional Equipment: You have a small token of some kind that represents your goal. You might take it out and look at it anytime you need a little inspiration.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You saw that the other PCs were pursuing the same goal as you, and you believed that joining forces would improve both of your chances at attaining your objectives.

2. One of the PCs gave you information or other assistance in your mission, and you are now repaying the favor.

3. Helping the PCs may put key resources you need into your hands.

4. In the pursuit of your goal, you were wounded. One of the other PCs found you and nursed you back to health, and you owe them a debt.

EDUCATED

You've studied a whole lot, either on your own or with a teacher. You know a little about many things and a lot about a few things, such as history, biology, geography, nature, or any other area of study. You probably spend your spare time reading and carry a couple of books with you wherever you go.

You gain the following characteristics:

Smart: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in three areas of knowledge of your choice.

Inability: You have few social graces. Any task involving charm, persuasion, or etiquette is hindered.

Additional Equipment: You have two additional books on topics of your choice.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. One of the other PCs asked you to come along because of your knowledge.

2. There's so much more you want to learn—and at least a few people in this group seem like fountains of knowledge.

3. You sometimes get teased for your bookish ways, and you hoped having a group around you might offset some of that.

4. You believed that the task might lead to important and interesting discoveries.



FOOLISH

Not everyone can be brilliant. Oh, you don't think of yourself as stupid, and you're not. It's just that others might have a bit more . . . wisdom. Insight. You prefer to barrel along headfirst through life and let others worry about things. Worrying's never helped you, so why bother? You take things at face value and don't fret about what tomorrow might bring.

You gain the following characteristics:

Unwise: -4 to your Intellect Pool.

Carefree: You succeed more on luck than anything. Every time you roll for a noncombat task, roll twice and take the higher result.

Intellect Weakness: Any time you spend points from your Intellect Pool, it costs you 1 more point than usual.

Inability: Any Intellect defense task is hindered.

Inability: Any task that involves seeing through a deception, an illusion, or a trap is hindered.

Additional Equipment: Check your pockets. You probably have something you forgot about. (You start with a small *inexpensive item* of your choice.)

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. Who knows? Seemed like a good idea at the time.
2. Someone asked you to join up with the other PCs. They told you not to ask too many questions, and that seemed fine to you.
3. Someone who cares about you got you involved to give you something to do and "maybe teach you some sense."
4. You lost a bet. The less said about that, the better.

GRACEFUL

You have a perfect sense of balance, moving and speaking with grace and beauty. You're quick, lithe, flexible, and dexterous. Your body is perfectly suited to moving in elegant ways, and you use that advantage in combat to dodge blows and accomplish physical tasks. You might wear garments that enhance your agile movement and sense of style.

You gain the following characteristics:

Agile: +2 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You're trained in all tasks involving balance and careful movement.

Skill: You're trained in all tasks involving physical performing arts.

Skill: You're trained in all Speed defense tasks.

Additional Equipment: You have an elegant scarf, headdress, or other item of clothing that you wear as your signature piece.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. One of the other PCs wants to learn how to move with more ease, and you offered to teach them.
2. You're bored of all the things you've been doing, and this seemed like a new and unique challenge.
3. You were injured and have only recently gotten back on your feet; you're hoping this experience will help you fully regain your gracefulness.
4. You wanted the chance to show off a little in front of the other PCs—perhaps one in specific.

It can be liberating and really fun to play a foolish character. In some ways, the pressure to always do the right, smart thing is off. On the other hand, if you play such a character as a bumbling moron in every situation, that can become annoying to everyone else at the table. As with everything, moderation is the key.

Inexpensive items, page 121

GRACIOUS

Helping others is your calling. It's why you're here. People delight in your outgoing and charitable nature, and you delight in their happiness. You're at your best when you're aiding others, either by explaining how they can best overcome a challenge or by demonstrating how to do so yourself.

You gain the following characteristics:

Generous: Allies who have spent the last day with you add +1 to their recovery rolls.

Altruistic: If you're standing next to a creature that takes damage, you can intercede and take 1 point of that damage yourself (reducing the damage inflicted on the creature by 1 point). If you have Armor, it does not provide a benefit when you use this ability.

Skill: You're trained in all tasks related to pleasant social interaction, putting others at ease, and gaining trust.

Helpful: Whenever you help another character, that character gains the benefit as if you were trained even if you are not trained or specialized in the attempted task.

Inability: While you are alone, all Intellect and Speed tasks are hindered.

Additional Equipment: You carry a thank-you letter from someone you once aided.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. Even though you didn't know most of the other PCs beforehand, you invited yourself along on their quest.
2. You saw the PCs struggling to overcome a problem and selflessly joined them to help.
3. You're nearly certain the PCs will fail without you.
4. All your life you've helped one community; you thought it was time to try helping another.

HARDY

You can take a lot of punishment, both physically and mentally, and still come back for more. It takes a lot to put you down. Neither physical nor mental shocks or damage have a lasting effect. You're tough to faze. Unflappable. Unstoppable.

You gain the following characteristics:

Resistant: +2 to your Might Pool, and +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Recover: You can make an extra recovery roll each day. This roll is just one action. So you can make two recovery rolls that each take one action, one roll that takes ten minutes, a fourth roll that takes one hour, and a fifth roll that requires ten hours of rest.

Skill: You are trained in Might defense tasks.

Skill: You are trained in Intellect defense tasks.

Inability: You're hardy but not necessarily strong. Any task involving moving, bending, or breaking things is hindered.

Inability: You have a lot of willpower and mental fortitude, but you're not necessarily smart. Any task involving knowledge or figuring out problems or puzzles is hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. The PCs recruited you after learning about your reputation as a survivor.
2. Someone asked you to watch over one of the PCs in particular, and you agreed.
3. You are bored and desperately in need of a challenge.
4. You lost a bet—unfairly, you think—and had to take someone's place on this mission.

Is there really much difference between a character who is Stout and another who is Hardy? The descriptors are indeed close, but the differences will become apparent in play. Players should choose the one they like best.



Lonnie Stout had, like all the men of his family, worked his whole life at Barrow Alkali Works, and at the Preston operation before it. They considered themselves company men, loyal to a fault. If perhaps Lonnie had had a friendly conversation with a couple of men from a certain larger mining operation in which the evening habits of his boss and the boss's son had come up—well!

—Salt of the Earth: A Tale for the Season

HONORABLE

You are trustworthy, fair, and forthright. You try to do what is right, to help others, and to treat them well. Lying and cheating are no way to get ahead—these things are for the weak, the lazy, or the despicable. You probably spend a lot of time thinking about your personal honor, how best to maintain it, and how to defend it if challenged. In combat, you are straightforward and offer quarter to any foe.

You were likely instilled with this sense of honor by a parent, mentor, or community. Sometimes the distinction between what is and isn't honorable varies with different schools of thought, but in broad strokes, those who are honorable can agree on most aspects of what honor means.

You gain the following characteristics:

Stalwart: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You are trained in pleasant social interactions.

Skill: You are trained in discerning others' true motives or seeing through lies.

Additional Equipment: You carry an item that you found. It belongs to someone else, and you hope to be able to give it back to them someday.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. The PCs' goals appear to be honorable and commendable, and you would like to help them.

2. The PCs don't always seem to make the best choices; you see it as your task to set them on a better moral route.

3. One of the other PCs invited you, hearing of your trustworthiness.

4. You put virtue before sense and defended someone's honor in the face of an organization or power far greater than you. You joined the PCs because they offered aid and friendship when others wouldn't out of fear of reprisal.

INDUSTRIOUS

You are hardworking and dedicated, a true problem solver that everyone knows they can count on. You're more focused than a hen on a June bug—but of course that means you often miss all the other stuff that's happening around you.

You gain the following characteristics:

Diligent: +4 to your Intellect Pool.

Outside the Box: When you take a round to study the problem that you want to tackle, you come up with a solution that has an excellent chance of succeeding. You gain an asset on your next noncombat action.

Skill: You're trained in tasks requiring incredible focus, determination, or concentration.

Inability: When you get focused on a task or problem, you pay little attention to anything else. You have an inability in sensing danger.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You've been working so hard lately that one of the other PCs suggested you take a break and join them for something else.

2. You suspected one of the other PCs could be really useful to the thing you're passionate about right now.

3. One of the other PCs was involved in something you worked on previously. They were impressed with your skills and invited you along.

4. You needed something new to sink your teeth into, and you're hoping this is it.



This feller could run his gob a mile a minute like a salesman . . . or a boss. Melvin, of course, trusted neither. He narrowed his eyes and nodded slightly. "Uh, mighta heard of it. I ain't from around here."

The man reached out and slapped Melvin on the shoulder. His touch was cold. Melvin could feel it through his shirt sleeve. "No sir, you ain't, are ya? I'd remember a big strong one like you—yes, indeed. You get to know most people when you live in the little towns like this don'tchee?" That little laugh again.

—Springtime in Boggs Holler,
Chapter Two: Hunger Pains



LOYAL

Once you commit to someone or something, you're in, no matter what. Some might say you're loyal to a fault. Others—especially those who are likely to benefit from your loyalty—probably sing your praises for being so dang reliable. You might be loyal to a person, group, or entity for a long period of time, or you might just be someone who's deeply dedicated to whoever you're working with right now.

You gain the following characteristics:

Dedicated: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in understanding motives.

Skill: You're trained in tasks related to deception, intimidation, and persuasion.

No Questions: You don't ask questions. You just get to work. When you choose to follow orders from someone, all noncombat tasks involving those orders are eased.

Inability: When you're working on your own, without anyone to guide you, all Intellect tasks are hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You deeply believe in this group's purpose, and nothing could have kept you from it.
2. Someone or something that you're loyal to asked you to infiltrate, and of course you said yes.
3. Another PC knows you as someone they can confide in, and invited you along.
4. One of the other PCs knows a secret of yours, and you came along to be sure they wouldn't spill it.

LUCKY

You rely on chance and timely good luck to get you through the worst (and maybe the best) of times. More than a few times you've heard people tell you "You can thank your lucky stars for that," and you know they're right. When you try your hand at something new, more often than not you find a measure of success. And even when bad things happen, you somehow sidestep the worst of it. More often, small things seem to go your way, you win contests, and you're often in the right place at the right time.

You gain the following characteristics:

Luck Pool: You have an additional Pool called Luck that begins with 3 points, and it has a maximum value of 3 points. When spending points from any other Pool, you can take one, some, or all of the points from your Luck Pool first. When you make a recovery roll to recover points to any other Pool, your Luck Pool is also refreshed by the same number of points. When your Luck Pool is at 0 points, it does not count against your **damage track**.

Advantage: When you use 1 XP to reroll a d20 for any roll that affects only you, the task is always eased.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You know part of being lucky is taking good advantage of opportunities, and this seems like exactly that.
2. You literally bumped into someone else on this adventure through sheer luck.
3. You found a suitcase lying alongside the road. It was battered, but inside you found a handful of items that led you here.
4. Your luck saved you when you narrowly avoided getting attacked by a catamount. One of the PCs saw the incident and invited you along.

Damage track, page 141

MYSTICAL

You think of yourself as mystical, attuned with the mysterious and the magical. Your true talents lie with the unseen and unknowable. You might have had these abilities since you were little, learned everything at a granny's knee, or had an experience that changed everything you know about the world.

You gain the following characteristics:

Smart: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in all actions involving identifying or understanding the magical.

Mystic Sense: You can sense whether there's something mystical or magical going on in situations where its presence is not obvious. You must study an object or location closely for a minute to get a feel for whether a mystical touch is at work.

Spell: You can perform **Hedge Magic** as a spell when you have a free hand and can pay the Intellect point cost.

Inability: You have a manner or an aura that others find a bit unnerving. Any task involving charm, persuasion, or deception is hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. Various signs, portents, or dreams led you here.
2. Your senses are telling you that one of the other PCs will need your aid soon.
3. One of the other PCs knew about your abilities and knowledge and asked you to join.
4. One of the other PCs helped you out with something unrelated to your skills, and you want to repay the favor.



October 24, 1874

I learned that trick at my daddy's knee. All the folks at the tent revival would be amazed when all around the altar, the candles would light themselves. It was easy as pie to make it work with the lanterns I carried down into the mine last night. It was a little trickier to make it blaze up the way I wanted, but I figured it out.

—Season 3, Episode 39:
The Blood of the Mountain

NEIGHBORLY

You've always been aware of others' needs, fears, burdens, and emotions. It's easy for you to see things from others' points of view and to know what they really want or need. Sure, you know the saying that it's easier to catch flies with honey than vinegar, but you truly believe in the power of kindness.

Of course, being a good neighbor takes time, and yours is limited. You've learned that some people don't deserve your time or attention, and you deal with them swiftly, saving your kindness for those who warrant it and can benefit from it.

You gain the following characteristics:

Emotionally Intuitive: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You know what it's like to go a mile in someone else's shoes. You're trained in all tasks related to pleasant social interaction and discerning the dispositions of others.

Karma: Sometimes people just help you out in return. To gain the aid of someone, you must use a one-action, ten-minute, or one-hour recovery roll (without gaining its healing benefit), and the GM determines the nature of the aid you gain. Usually, their act of kindness isn't enough to turn a bad situation completely around, but it might moderate a bad situation and lead to new opportunities. For example, if you're badly injured, a passerby might be able to bring you some water, holler for help, or assist you with healing.

Inability: Being kind comes with a few risks. All tasks related to detecting falsehoods are hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. One of the PCs did you a favor, and you want to return it.
2. You feel like the PCs could really use your assistance, even if they don't know it.
3. You helped someone who took advantage of you, and you want to get away from them for a while, so you joined up.
4. You're ready to take your benevolence on the road and help others.



Hedge Magic, page 35

OFFISH

You hide your true self behind a mask and are loath to let anyone see who you really are. Protecting yourself, physically and emotionally, is what you care about most, and you'd just as soon keep everyone else at a safe distance. You might be suspicious of everyone you meet, expecting the worst from others so you won't be surprised when they prove you right. Or you might just be a bit reserved, careful about letting others through your gruff exterior to who you really are. Or maybe you nurse an old hurt and this is how you cope.

Most likely, you have an abrasive personality and tend to be pessimistic in your outlook. No one can be as reserved as you are and make many friends.

You gain the following characteristics:

Suspicious: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You are trained in all Intellect defense tasks.

Skill: You are trained in all tasks involving discerning the truth, piercing disguises, and recognizing falsehoods and other deceptions.

Inability: Your suspicious nature makes you unlikeable. Any task involving deception or persuasion is hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. One of the PCs managed to overcome your defenses and befriend you.
2. You want to see what the PCs are up to, so you accompany them to catch them in the act of some wrongdoing.
3. You have made a few enemies and take up with the PCs for protection.
4. The PCs are the only ones who will put up with you.

OUTCAST

You have walked a long and lonely road, leaving your home and your life behind. You might have committed a horrible crime, something so awful that your community forced you out, and if you dare return, you face the repercussions. You might have been accused of a crime you didn't commit and now must pay the price for someone else's wicked deed. Your exile might be the result of a social gaffe—perhaps you shamed your family or a friend, or you embarrassed yourself in front of your peers, an authority, or someone you respect. Whatever the reason, you have left your old life behind and now strive to make a new one.

You gain the following characteristics:

Self-Reliant: +2 to your Might Pool.

Loner: You gain no benefit when you get help with a task from another character.

Skill: You're trained in all tasks involving sneaking.

Skill: You're trained in all tasks involving foraging, hunting, and finding safe places to rest or hide.

Inability: Living on your own for as long as you have makes you slow to trust others and awkward in social situations. Any task involving social interaction is hindered.

Additional Equipment: You have a keepsake from your past—an old picture, a locket with a few strands of hair inside, or a lighter given to you by someone important. You keep the object close at hand and pull it out to help you remember better times.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. The other PCs earned your trust by helping you when you needed it. You accompany them to repay them.
2. While exploring on your own, you discovered something strange. The PCs were the only ones who believed you, and they have accompanied you to help you deal with the problem.
3. One of the other PCs reminds you of someone you used to know.
4. You miss having community around you. You hope joining the other PCs on this mission might give you a chance to belong.

Helping, page 150

PERCEPTIVE

You miss little. You pay attention, pick out the small details in the world around you, and are skilled at making deductions from the information you find. You might turn your talents toward sleuthing, scouting, or dabbling in science.

As adept as you are at finding clues, you have no skill at picking up on social cues. You overlook any offense that your deductions give and are unaware of how uncomfortable your scrutiny can make those around you. You tend to dismiss others as being intellectually small compared to you, which avails you little when you need a favor.

You gain the following characteristics:

Smart: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You have an eye for detail. You are trained in any task that involves finding or noticing small details.

Skill: You know a little about everything. You are trained in any task that involves identifying objects or calling to mind a minor detail or bit of trivia.

Skill: Your skill at making deductions can be imposing. You are trained in any task that involves intimidating another creature.

Inability: Your confidence comes off as arrogance to those who don't know you. Any task involving positive social interactions is hindered.

Additional Equipment: You have a journal or sketchpad, as well as writing or drawing utensils.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You overheard the other PCs discussing their mission and offered your services.
2. One of the PCs asked you to come along, believing that your talents would be invaluable to the mission.
3. You believe that the PCs' mission is somehow related to one of your investigations.
4. A third party recruited you to follow the PCs and see what they were up to.

REBELLIOUS

Bending the knee has always rankled you. You question authority at every chance, and you aren't afraid to stand up for what you believe to be right, even when you might be wrong. You prefer to be master of your fate and will take matters into your own hands when necessary.

You gain the following characteristics:

Certain: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in interactions that involve intimidation and questioning authority.

Skill: You're trained in actions involved in persuading others to join your cause.

Nope: Any time someone gives you advice or a command, or otherwise tries to get you to do something and you do the opposite, your task is eased. (If another PC uses a support ability such as **Friendly Advice** and you do the opposite, you still gain the benefit of that ability.)

Inability: You're great at listening to your own voice, but that means you don't always pay attention to those around you. You're hindered in tasks involving listening to others and retaining information.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. Someone—who either doesn't know you at all or who knows you a bit too well—told you not to.
2. The PCs seemed like they do their own thing, and you've got a ton of respect for that.
3. What's it to you? You've got your reasons.
4. One of the PCs seemed like they could use a little training in caring less what others think, and you thought you could help them with that.

Advice From a Friend, page 53

SCRAPPY

It's part of your nature to question what others think can't or shouldn't be done. You're not insane, of course—you wouldn't attempt to take on a catamount bare-handed just because you were dared. Probably.

There's impossible and then there's the just barely possible. You like to push the latter further than others, because it gives you a rush of satisfaction and pleasure when you succeed. The more you succeed, the more you find yourself looking for that next risky challenge to try yourself against.

You gain the following characteristics:

Nimble: +4 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You're adept at leveraging risk, and you are trained in tasks that involve some element of chance, such as playing games or choosing between two or three apparently equal options.

Pressing Your Luck: You can choose to automatically succeed on one task without rolling, as long as the task's difficulty is no higher than 6. When you do so, however, you also trigger a GM intrusion as if you had rolled a 1. The intrusion doesn't invalidate the success, but it probably qualifies it in some fashion. You can do this one time, although the ability renews each time you make a ten-hour recovery roll.

Inability: You may be nimble, but you're not sneaky. Tasks related to sneaking and staying quiet are hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting

Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. It seemed like there were equal odds that the other PCs wouldn't succeed, which sounded good to you.
2. You think the tasks ahead will present you with unique and fulfilling challenges.
3. One of your biggest risks failed to go your way, and you need money to help pay that debt.
4. You bragged that you never saw a risk you didn't like, which is how you reached your current point.

SHARP-EYED

You're perceptive and well aware of your surroundings. You notice the little details and remember them. You can be difficult to surprise. You might carry something that helps you see or hear things even more clearly.

You gain the following characteristics:

Skill: You're trained in initiative actions.

Skill: You're trained in perception actions.

Find the Flaw: If an opponent has a straightforward weakness (takes extra damage from fire, can't see out of their left eye, and so on), the GM will tell you what it is.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

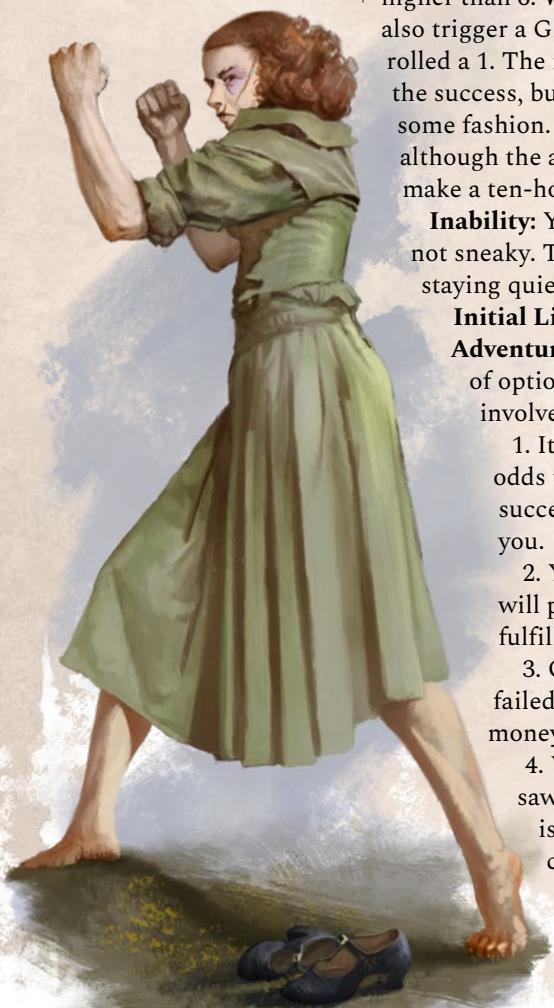
From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You heard about what was going on, saw a flaw in the other PCs' plan, and joined up to help them out.
2. You noticed that the PCs have a foe (or at least a tail) they weren't aware of.
3. You saw that the other PCs were up to something interesting and got involved.
4. You've been noticing some strange things going on, and this all appears related.



Coralee was very pale, and D.L. could still see the ghost of a bruise on one of her cheeks. She could also see why her sister had argued that Coralee could not have physically committed the crime. She was too small, too thin—and not with the wiry sort of strength you found in farm girls. Coralee looked like she might blow away in a strong wind. D.L. didn't like to speculate about why, but she knew she might need those details and more before all this was over.

—Season 2, Episode 19:
Where the Sun Never Shines



SHIFTY

You're the first to say you're neither sneaky nor sly. Or, more likely, you're the only one to say it. Your friends probably love the way you can talk your way around anything, get into anywhere, or find just the thing you need in someone else's pocket. But everyone else? Not so much. That's okay—you know how to get everything you need.

You gain the following characteristics:

Slick: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You are trained in all tasks involving manual dexterity, such as stealing, performing sleight of hand, and lockpicking.

Skill: You are trained in all tasks dealing with persuasion, bluffing, misdirection, and deception.

Sleight of Hand: Choose one noncombat trick, foil, or feint to be your specialty. When you use it successfully, you have an asset on your next noncombat action. For example, you might choose a distracting card trick as your specialty. If you successfully distract your foe with the trick, you gain an asset on your next action, whether it be persuasion, pickpocketing, or something else.

All Brain, No Brawn: When you apply Effort when making a Might roll, you must spend 1 extra point from your Speed Pool.

Additional Equipment: You begin the game with a \$1 scrip and one small sleight-of-hand item.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You beat one of the other PCs badly in a card game, but they had a blast anyway and asked you to come along.
2. The other PCs think they might need someone with your skills for something they're trying to do, and asked you to come along.
3. You might have stolen from the wrong person and they might be looking for someone who's traveling alone, so you talked the others into letting you join them for a little while.
4. Sometimes you can just smell opportunity. And this bunch? They reek of it.

SKEPTICAL

People say a lot of things, but that doesn't make them all true. Or even any of them. You're not a naysayer straight out, but you believe in finding out the facts of things before you make up your mind.

You gain the following characteristics:

Insightful: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in identifying.

Skill: You're trained in all actions that involve seeing through a trick, an illusion, a rhetorical ruse designed to evade the issue, or a lie. For example, you're better at keeping your eye on the cup containing the hidden ball, sensing an illusion, or realizing if someone is lying to you (but only if you specifically concentrate and use this skill).

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You overheard other PCs having an opinion on something you were skeptical about, so you approached them and asked for proof.
2. One of the other PCs made you suspicious, so you followed them, which brought you into the action.
3. You are trying to prove whether something is true or not, and you need money to do it.
4. Your theory about something related to this adventure can be validated only by your own senses, so you came along.



D.L. held up a hand. "Stop. I've told you before, Marcie, I don't want anything to do with haints and boogers and other mystical nonsense. I deal in things I can prove."

—Season 2, Episode 19:
Where the Sun Never Shines

Scrip, page 118

SKITTISH

What's that? A haint in the shadows? A catamount among the trees? Or just your imagination? Doesn't matter—when faced with danger, real or imagined, courage is not your friend. Fear gnaws at your heart, chewing away at your mind, driving you to distraction. Most times, you flee from threats, back down from confrontations, and skedaddle when the going gets tough. Yet for all that fear dogs you and possibly shames you, your cowardly nature proves to be a useful friend from time to time. Listening to your fears has helped you escape danger and avoid taking unnecessary risks. Others might have suffered in your place, and you might be the first to admit this fact, but secretly you feel intense relief from having avoided an unthinkable and terrible fate.

You gain the following characteristics:

Furtive: +2 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You're trained in stealth-based tasks.

Skill: You're trained in running actions.

Skill: You're trained in any action taken to escape danger, flee from a dangerous situation, or wheedle your way out of trouble.

Inability: You don't willingly enter dangerous situations. Any initiative actions (to determine who goes first in combat) are hindered.

Inability: You fall to pieces when you have to undertake a potentially dangerous task alone. Any such task (such as attacking a creature by yourself) is hindered.

Additional Equipment: You carry a token, talisman, or other object to keep you safe, give you courage, or comfort you in dark times.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You believe that you're being hunted by something or someone, and you talked one of the other PCs into being your protector.

2. You seek to escape your shame and take up with capable individuals in the hopes of repairing your reputation.

3. While running away from something, you ran smack into one of the other PCs, and they were so kind, you decided to join them.

4. The group answered your cries for help when you were in trouble.

SMART

You're quite smart. Your memory is sharp, and you easily grasp concepts that others might struggle with. This aptitude doesn't necessarily mean that you've had years of formal education, but you have learned a great deal in your life, primarily because you pick things up quickly and retain so much.

You gain the following characteristics:

Smart: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in an area of knowledge of your choice.

Skill: You're trained in all actions that involve remembering or memorizing things you experience directly. For example, instead of being good at recalling details of geography that you read about in a book, you can remember a path through a set of tunnels that you've explored before.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. One of the other PCs asked your opinion of the mission, knowing that if you thought it was a good idea, it probably was.

2. You saw value in what the other PCs were doing.

3. You believed that the task might lead to important and interesting discoveries.

4. A colleague requested that you take part in the mission as a favor.

STEALTHY

You're sneaky, slippery, and agile. These talents help you hide, move quietly, and pull off tricks that require sleight of hand. Most likely, you're wiry and small. However, you're not much of a sprinter—you're more dexterous than fleet of foot.

You gain the following characteristics:

Quick: +2 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You're trained in all stealth tasks.

Skill: You're trained in all interactions involving lies or trickery.

Skill: You're trained in all special abilities involving illusions or trickery.

Inability: You're sneaky but not fast. All movement-related tasks are hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You attempted to steal from one of the other PCs. That character caught you and forced you to come along with them.

2. You were tailing one of the other PCs for reasons of your own, which brought you into the action.

3. Your employer paid you to come along.

4. You overheard the other PCs talking about a topic that interested you, so you decided to approach the group.

Descriptors like Skittish and Shifty might not be appropriate for every group. These are potentially negative traits, and some people want their PCs to be entirely heroic. But others don't mind a little moral grayness thrown into the mix. Still others see things like Skittish and Shifty as traits to overcome as their characters develop (probably earning them different descriptors).

STOUT

You're extremely strong and physically powerful, and you use these qualities well, whether through violence or feats of prowess. You likely have a brawny build and impressive muscles.

You gain the following characteristics:

Very Powerful: +4 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in all actions involving breaking inanimate objects.

Skill: You're trained in Might defense tasks.

Additional Equipment: You have an extra medium weapon or heavy weapon.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You're acting as a bodyguard for one of the other PCs.
2. One of the PCs is family, and you came along to watch out for them.
3. You're bored of doing the same physical action over and over, and sought out a new way to use your body.
4. You stepped in to defend one of the PCs when they were threatened. While talking to them afterward, you heard about the group's task.

SUPERSTITIOUS

You don't care if others believe—you believe, and that's enough. Your whole life, you've paid attention and followed the signs, portents, and omens that others don't or won't see. Sometimes you get ridiculed for your beliefs, but those who've spent any amount of time with you come to appreciate the way you move through the world.

You gain the following characteristics:

Believer: +4 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in initiative actions.

Skill: You're trained in sensing danger.

Throw Salt: When something bad happens, you act on your beliefs to dispel it. Once after each ten-hour recovery roll, you can refuse a GM intrusion without spending XP. Alternatively, you can spend 1 XP and work with the GM to turn the intrusion into something positive for your character.

Hands Tied: Sometimes you can't act to bring about good luck or dispel bad. Any time you're unable to take an action (such as if your hands are tied, you're stunned, and so on), your next action is hindered.

Additional Equipment: You carry something on you at all times, such as a four-leaf clover, an unbroken mirror, a rabbit's foot, or a charm, to bring you luck and keep you safe.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You saw something that suggested one of the other PCs is about to have some bad luck, and you'd like to help.
2. All the signs pointed you here.
3. While trying to avoid something that seemed like it was going to bring you bad luck, you happened upon this group.
4. One of the other PCs expressed interest about superstitions, and you'd like to share your knowledge.

APPALACHIA SUPERSTITIONS

If your character is Superstitious, they might believe in some of the following common Appalachian superstitions. There are lots more out there, though, and characters can also make up their own based on their experiences and beliefs.

- Whenever you're drinking alcohol, pour a little on the ground to appease the spirits.
- If you harvest apples from a tree, leave at least one to keep the devil away.
- When someone dies, stop nearby clocks to mark the time and ward off another death.
- A screech owl hooting at dusk means someone will die.
- All kinds of things bring bad luck, including walking across graves, setting an empty rocking chair in motion, and a broom falling for no reason.
- Things that bring good luck include seeing a white horse, spitting on a new baby, and dreaming of bees.
- Don't let anyone sweep under your feet or you'll never get married. (Alternatively, do let someone sweep under your feet if you don't want to get married.)
- If your nose is itching, someone's coming.
- If your palm itches, you've got some money coming your way.



SWIFT

You move quickly, able to sprint in short bursts and work with your hands with dexterity. You're great at crossing distances quickly but not always smoothly. You are likely slim and muscular.

You gain the following characteristics:

Fast: +4 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You're trained in initiative actions (to determine who goes first in combat).

Skill: You're trained in running actions.

Inability: You're fast but not necessarily graceful. Any task involving balance is hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. Against your better judgment, you joined the other PCs because you saw that they were in danger.
2. One of the other PCs saw you compete in a race or challenge and recruited you for your unique talents.
3. You raced in to save one of the other PCs who was in dire need.
4. Sometimes even you need to slow down a bit; this mission seemed like an opportunity to take life at normal speed, at least for a little while.

TICKLED

You're cheerful, friendly, and outgoing. You put others at ease with a big smile and a joke, possibly at your own expense, though lightly ribbing your companions who can take it is also one of your favorite pastimes. Sometimes others say you never take anything seriously. That's not true, of course, but you have learned that to dwell on the bad too long robs the world of joy. You've always got a new joke in your back pocket because you collect them the way others collect bottle caps and baseball cards.

You gain the following characteristics:

Witty: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're jovial and set others at ease with your attitude. You are trained in all tasks related to pleasant social interaction.

Skill: You have an advantage in figuring out the punch lines of jokes you've never heard before. You are trained in all tasks related to solving puzzles and riddles.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You know things have been tough for one of the other PCs for a while now, and you hoped your presence might cheer them up.
2. The other PCs thought you'd bring some much-needed levity to the team.
3. You decided that all fun and no work was not the best way to get through life, so you joined up with the PCs.
4. It was either go with the PCs or face up to a circumstance that was anything but jovial.



TONGUE-TIED

You've never been much of a talker. When forced to interact with others, you never think of the right thing to say—words fail you entirely, or they come out all wrong. You often end up saying precisely the wrong thing and insulting someone unintentionally. Most of the time, you just keep mum. This makes you a good listener instead—a careful observer. It also means that you're better at doing things than talking about them. You're quick to take action.

You gain the following characteristics:

Actions, Not Words: +2 to your Might Pool and +2 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You are trained in perception.

Skill: You are trained in initiative (unless it's a social situation).

Inability: All tasks relating to social interaction are hindered.

Inability: All tasks involving verbal communication or relaying information are hindered.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You just tagged along and no one told you to leave.
2. You saw something important the other PCs did not and (with some effort) managed to relate it to them.
3. You intervened to save one of the other PCs when they were in danger.
4. One of the other PCs told you everything—including some things they shouldn't have—and encouraged you to join them.

UNCANNY

You are often struck by a sense of knowing what someone will say, how they will react, or how events might unfold. Maybe you're great at calculating the possibilities, maybe you've been given a strange gift of glimpsing the near future, or maybe you're just good at reading others and extrapolating a situation. Whatever the case, many who look into your eyes immediately glance away, as if afraid of what you might see in their expression.

You gain the following characteristics:

Innate: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You are trained in perception tasks.

Know What to Do: You can act immediately, even if it's not your turn. Afterward, on your next regular turn, any action you take is hindered. You can do this one time, although the ability is renewed each time you make a recovery roll.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure:

From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You just knew you had to come along.
2. You convinced one of the other PCs that your intuition is invaluable.
3. You felt that something terrible would happen if you didn't go.
4. You're confident the reason you arrived at this point will soon become clear.

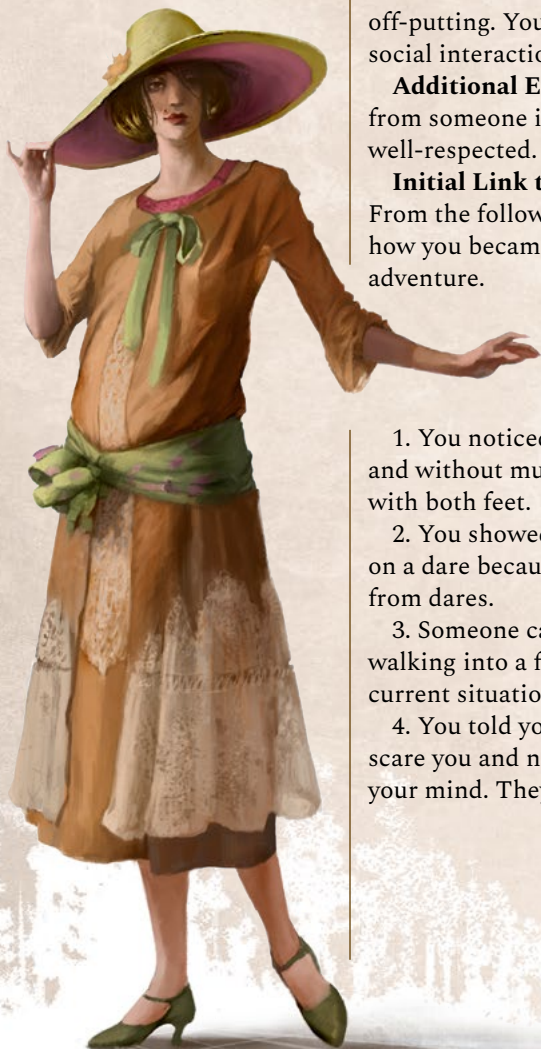


Then, of course, there was their youngest, Sheila. Her gift for making folks see what they needed to see during the performance of some of their less-than-authentic miracles—and her uncanny ability to keep the family hidden when dissatisfied customers or the law came a-calling—might not have seemed very Christian on the surface. But it enabled them to keep on doing their good work, so they didn't think too hard on it. In particular, no one ever thought to ask little Sheila what she believed, or how she felt using her gifts to deceive folks on the nights the blessings didn't work out the way they wanted. Nor what she thought of helping her daddy take good people's money for something that Jesus never charged two nickels for. The truth was, it didn't sit right with her. Not right at all.

—Season 3, Episode 38: *Diary of a Preacher's Daughter*

What other people might say to someone who's Uppity: "Don't get above your raising" or "Don't put on airs."

Hounds, page 364



UPPITY

You're a self-assertive sort, confident in your abilities and knowledge, and perhaps a bit dismissive toward ideas that you don't agree with. You know a lot, you've seen a lot, and you're not afraid to share that with others. Some people call you bold and brave, but those you've put in their place might call you uppity or arrogant. Whatever. It's not in your nature to care what other people think about you, unless those people are truly family.

You gain the following characteristics:

Know-It-All: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You know (or at least pretend to know) a lot about a lot, and you use that to your advantage however you can. You're trained in persuasion, coercion, and intimidation.

Skill: You believe strongly in yourself, perhaps a bit too much. You're trained in resisting mental effects.

Inability: Your need to be right or to know more than those around you can be off-putting. You are hindered in positive social interactions.

Additional Equipment: You carry a letter from someone important, scholarly, or well-respected.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You noticed something weird going on, and without much thought, you jumped in with both feet.

2. You showed up when and where you did on a dare because, hey, you don't back down from dares.

3. Someone called you out, but instead of walking into a fight, you walked into your current situation.

4. You told your friend that nothing could scare you and nothing you saw would change your mind. They brought you to this point.

VENGEFUL

One moment changed everything for you. One dreadful encounter, one betrayal, or one horrific tragedy altered your course and made you who you are today. Looking back at that time, you often wonder how your life would have unfolded if not for the event that ruined everything. The life you imagine you should have had haunts you and feeds your appetite for revenge until vengeance is the only thing you have left.

To be vengeful, you must have someone or something you want revenge against and someone or something to avenge. Work with your GM to determine what happened that affected you so strongly. Maybe a pack of **Hounds** were sent to wipe out your family. Maybe a rival destroyed your business by sullyng your name. Maybe you were exiled for something you didn't even have a hand in. Death, fame, money, love: any of these can support your motivation.

In addition, consider to what extent your character will go to gain vengeance. Will you compromise your values to destroy the ones who wronged you? Will you sacrifice your companions to get what you want? Can you imagine a life after you get revenge, or will you gladly throw yours away to punish those who wronged you?

You gain the following characteristics:

Skill: The fires of your hatred make you an imposing figure. You're trained in any task that involves intimidation, threats, or inflicting pain through torture.

Skill: You will follow your enemies to the ends of the earth. You're trained in any task that involves finding and following tracks.

Skill: You're trained in Speed defense tasks.

Additional Equipment: You have an additional medium weapon.

Initial Link to the Starting Adventure: From the following list of options, choose how you became involved in the first adventure.

1. You and the other PCs are headed in the same direction.

2. You believe that one of the PCs knows something about your enemy. You accompany the group to find out what that character knows.

3. One of the PCs survived the event that caused you to become vengeful. You travel with that character to protect them.

4. You drew everyone together to help you get revenge on your enemies.

Chapter 6: CHARACTER FOCUS

Focus is what makes a character unique. Ideally, no two PCs in a group should have the same focus. A focus gives a character benefits when they create their character and each time they ascend to the next tier. It's the verb of the sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*."

This chapter contains a wide variety of foci to choose from, such as *Manifests the Mountain*, *Cannot Escape the Darkness*, and *Makes a High Lonesome Sound*.

When you choose a character focus, you get a special connection to one or more of your fellow PCs, one or two first-tier abilities, and perhaps one or two pieces of additional equipment that might be required to use your ability or that might pair well with the focus. For instance, a character who crafts items needs crafting supplies and a set of tools. A character who has a beast companion needs food and maybe a collar or harness. That said, most foci don't require additional equipment.

Each focus also offers suggestions for *GM intrusions* specific to that focus.

As you progress to a new tier, your focus grants you more abilities. Each tier's benefits are independent of and cumulative with benefits from other tiers (unless indicated otherwise). So if a first-tier ability grants +1

to Armor and a fourth-tier ability also grants +1 to Armor, when the character reaches fourth tier, a total of +2 to Armor is granted.

THE STORY BEHIND YOUR FOCUS

The story of how your character came to have the focus that they do is yours to define, as long as it fits within the setting. For example, if your character *Crafts Powerful Objects*, maybe they learned it from their mamaw when they were little, or perhaps they made a bargain of some kind when they were older to gain certain skills. Maybe they don't know where their gifts came from, and they want to find out. (It's okay for you, the player, to know the answer even if your character doesn't.)

Giving a little thought to the origin of your character's focus can really help flesh out their background, tie them to places and people, and connect to other parts of their character. Maybe the bargain your character made for their skills ties into the reason they're *Beholden*. Maybe their *character arc* is all about discovering the origins of their gifts. Or maybe they don't care one way or another where it came from—they're just glad to have it.

For some foci, you get more than one new ability when you reach a new tier. The information in the focus will tell you if you need to choose between multiple abilities. At tier 3 and tier 6, you are asked to choose one ability from the two options provided.

Manifests the Mountain,
page 105

Cannot Escape the Darkness,
page 89

Makes a High Lonesome Sound, page 103

Crafts Powerful Objects,
page 91

GM intrusion, page 162

Beholden, page 63

Character arc, page 162

LIST OF FOCI

Applies Themselves	Fears No Haints	Possesses the Gift
Becomes the Beast	Gets Rough and Rowdy	Serves the Green
Calls Home the Hounds	Hunts	Shares the Ways and Signs
Cannot Escape the Darkness	Knows Jack	Shoots Sharp and Straight
Crafts Powerful Objects	Knows the Unknowable	Speaks in Tongues
Cures What Ails Ya	Makes a High Lonesome Sound	Walks These Woods
Defends What Matters	Manifests the Mountain	Would Rather Be Reading
Delves the Darkness	Masters the Swarm	
Does What Needs Doin'	Moves Like a Catamount	

APPLIES THEMSELF

No one's ever said you don't give it your all. Whatever you're doing, but particularly when you're learning something new, you're focused, immersed, and fast. Something comes up that would knock everyone else back on their heels, you've got a solution or at least an idea of what to do next. And with every experience, you pay attention.

Some say you get a little help from magic, and maybe you do and maybe you don't. But that hardly matters next to the fact that you show up, you do the work, and you get better and smarter every time.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. You're always trying to impress them with your learning, but you're not sure why.
2. Pick one other PC. They want to learn something from you, but you're not sure if you're the best teacher for them.
3. Pick one other PC. They say they've known you for years, but you barely seem to remember them.
4. Pick one other PC. That character recently mocked you in some fashion that really hurt your feelings. How you deal with this (if at all) is up to you.

Additional Equipment: You have an additional book about a topic that interests you.

GM Intrusions: Accidents and mistakes are great teachers. Sometimes the thing you're sure you've learned wasn't entirely correct—or you didn't learn it as well as you thought you did.

Tier 1: Enhanced Intellect. You gain 3 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

There's Your Problem. You are trained in tasks related to figuring out how to solve problems with multiple solutions (like the best way to pack a vehicle, calm an enraged stranger, rescue an animal, or find your way through a caving system). Enabler.

Tier 2: Quick Study. You learn from repetitive actions. You gain an asset to rolls for similar tasks after the first time (such as operating the same device or making attacks against the same foe). Once you move on to a new task, the familiarity with the old task fades—unless you start doing it again. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Enhanced Intellect Edge or Flex Skill as your tier 3 ability.

Whichever one you choose, you also get Hard to Distract.

Enhanced Intellect Edge. You gain +1 to your Intellect Edge. Enabler.

Flex Skill. At the beginning of each day, choose one task (other than attacks or defense) on which you will concentrate. For the rest of that day, you're trained in that task. You can't use this ability with a skill in which you're already trained to become specialized. Enabler.

Hard to Distract. You are trained in Intellect defense tasks. Enabler.

Tier 4: Pay It Forward (3 Intellect points). You can pass on what you've learned. When you give another character a suggestion involving their next action that is not an attack, their action is eased for one minute. Action.

Tier 5: Learned a Few Things. You are trained in two areas of knowledge of your choice, or specialized in one area of knowledge of your choice. Enabler.

Enhanced Intellect. You gain 3 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Two Things at Once or Brainwave as your Tier 6 ability.

Two Things at Once (6 Intellect points). Your mind is well-trained. You're able to divide your attention and take two separate actions this round. Enabler.

Brainwave. Any time you use Effort on an Intellect action, add one of the following enhancements to the action (your choice):

- Free level of Effort
 - Automatic minor effect
- Enabler.



Ada was a gardener, not some farmer scraping by on handouts from the church and what she could coax out of the dirt like her mama. She had *applied herself* in school, as Principal Vance at Mavisdale High used to say, and earned a scholarship to what was at the time the newly opened college over in Glamorgan, where she'd earned her nursing degree.

—Bumper Crop: A Tale for the Season

Free level of Effort, page 132
Minor effect, page 133

BECOMES THE BEAST

They say everyone's got two wolves inside them—but you actually might. You have one, at least. Or a cat. Or bat. Or sometimes a catamount. It all depends on your mood and the situation. When you will it, you can transform into a creature of your choice. And no matter what others might think, you're always still you when you're in beast form. You've just got a little something extra.

Maybe you've always had this ability—something passed down from your relatives, perhaps. Or maybe you taught yourself, becoming a devotee of creatures and magic. Possibly you don't know where it comes from, but you're not one to look a gift horse (yes, you can take that shape too) in the mouth.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. You have known that character for a while, and they helped you gain control of your focus-related abilities.

2. Pick one other PC. They are skeptical of your claims about something momentous that happened in your past. They might even attempt to discredit you or discover the “secret” behind your story, though that's up to them.

3. Pick one other PC. Since this character saw you in beast form, they have been terrified of you. You are determined to show them that you're not as dangerous as they believe.

4. Pick one other PC. Something about them complements your abilities. When they stand next to you, the first focus ability you use in any 24-hour period costs 2 fewer points.

GM Intrusions: People easily become frightened by or aggressive toward shapeshifters. The transformation takes longer than expected. Even beasts have their vulnerable spots, and savvy foes can find them.

Tier 1: Beast Shape (3+ Intellect points).

You change into an animal as small as a rat or up to your own size (such as a large dog or small bear) for ten minutes. Each time you transform, you can take a different animal shape. Your equipment becomes part of the transformation, rendering it unusable unless it has a passive effect, such as armor. In this form your stats remain the same as your

normal form, but you can move and attack according to your animal shape (attacks from most animals this size are medium weapons, which you can use without penalty). Tasks requiring hands (such as using door handles or pushing buttons) are hindered when in animal form. You cannot speak but can still use abilities that don't rely on human speech. You gain two minor abilities associated with the creature you become (see the **Beast Form Minor Abilities** table). For example, if you transform into a bat, you become trained in perception and can fly up to a long distance each round. If you transform into an otter, you are trained in swimming and can hold your breath for a long time.

If you apply a level of Effort when you use this ability, you can either become a talking animal or take a hybrid shape. The talking animal shape looks exactly like a normal animal, but you can still talk and use any abilities that rely on human speech. The hybrid shape is like your normal form but with animalistic features, even if that animal is something much smaller than you (such as a bat or rat). In this hybrid form you can speak, use all of your abilities, make attacks like an animal, and perform tasks using hands without being hindered. Anyone who sees you clearly in this hybrid form would never mistake you for a mere animal.

Action to change or revert.

Tier 2: Communication (2 Intellect points).

You can convey a basic concept to a creature that normally can't speak or understand speech. The creature can also give you a very basic answer to a simple question. Action.

Soothe the Savage (2 Intellect points).

You calm a nonhuman beast within a short distance. You must speak to it (although it doesn't need to understand your words), and it must see you. It remains calm for one minute or for as long as you focus all your attention on it. The GM has final say over what counts as a nonhuman beast, but unless some kind of deception is at work, you should know whether you can affect a creature before you attempt to use this ability on it. Action.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Bigger Beast Shape or Greater Beast Form as your tier 3 ability.

Beast Form Minor Abilities table, page 86

BEAST FORM MINOR ABILITIES

Use the following as examples or suggestions of what a character gains when in the shape of an animal. If an animal shape lists two skills, the character chooses which one they want each time they take that shape.

Animal	Skill Training	Other Abilities
Badger	Climbing	Scent
Bat	Perception	Flying
Bear	Climbing	Scent
Bird	Perception	Flying
Boar	Might defense	Scent
Cat	Climbing or stealth	Small
Catamount	Climbing or stealth	Fast
Constrictor snake	Climbing	Constrict
Cottontail	Jumping	Small
Crocodile	Stealth or swimming	Constrict
Deer	Perception	Fast
Dog	Social interaction or perception	Scent
Fish	Stealth or swimming	Aquatic
Fox	Perception or stealth	Small
Frog	Jumping or stealth	Aquatic
Horse	Perception	Fast
Moose	Smashing	Fast
Otter	Swimming	Aquatic
Rat	Stealth	Small
Salamander	Climbing or stealth	Small
Turtle	Might defense	Armor
Venomous snake	Climbing	Venom
Wolf	Perception	Scent

Aquatic: The animal breathes water instead of air, is able to breathe water in addition to breathing air, or is able to stay underwater for long periods of time.

Armor: The animal has a thick hide or shell, granting +1 to Armor.

Constrict: The animal can grip its opponent fast after making a melee attack (usually with a bite or claw), easing attack rolls against that foe on later turns until the animal releases the foe.

Fast: The animal can move a long distance on its turn instead of a short distance.

Flying: The animal can fly, which (depending on the type of animal) may be up to a short or long distance on its turn.

Scent: The animal has a strong sense of smell, gaining an asset on tracking and dealing with darkness or blindness.

Small: The animal is considerably smaller than a human, easing its Speed defense tasks but hindering tasks to move heavy things.

Venom: The animal is poisonous (usually through a bite), inflicting 1 additional point of damage.

The GM can mix up the combinations of skills and other abilities for these beast shapes as they see fit.

Bigger Beast Shape. When you use **Beast Shape**, your animal form grows to about twice its normal size. Being so large, your beast form gains the following additional bonuses: +1 to Armor, +5 to your Might Pool, and you are trained in using your animal form's natural attacks as heavy weapons (if you weren't already). However, your Speed defense tasks are hindered. While bigger, you also gain an asset to tasks that are easier for a larger creature to perform, like climbing, intimidating, wading rivers, and so on. Enabler.

Greater Beast Form. When using **Beast Shape**, your animal form gains the following additional bonuses: +1 to your Might Edge, +2 to your Speed Pool, and +1 to your Speed Edge. Enabler.

Tier 4: Animal Scrying (4+ Intellect points). If you know the general location of an animal that is friendly toward you and within 1 mile (1.5 km) of your location, you can sense through its senses for up to ten minutes. If you are not in animal form or not in a form similar to that animal, you must apply a level of Effort to use this ability. Action to establish.

Tier 5: Total Awareness. You possess such a high level of awareness that it's very difficult to surprise, hide from, or sneak up on you. When you apply a level of Effort to initiative and perception tasks, you gain two **free levels of Effort**. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose between **Blurring Speed** or **Lend Beast Shape** as your tier 6 ability.

Blurring Speed (7 Speed points). You move so quickly that until your next turn, you look like a blur. While you are blurred, if you apply Effort to a melee attack task or Speed defense task, you get a free level of Effort on that task; you can move a short distance as part of another action or a long distance as your entire action. Enabler.

Lend Beast Shape (6+ Intellect points). You change into an animal, and one willing creature within immediate range also transforms into an animal of that type (bear, tiger, wolf, and so on) for ten minutes, as if they were using your **Beast Shape** ability. For each level of Effort applied, you can

affect one additional creature. All creatures transforming with you must be your size or smaller. A creature can revert to its normal form as an action, but it cannot then change back into the animal form. One creature (whether you or someone else) changing form does not affect any other creature affected with this ability. Action.

CALLS HOME THE HOUNDS

To say you have a way with animals and nonhuman creatures doesn't begin to cover it. Your ability to communicate with and connect to them is positively uncanny. There's something about you that makes beasts not just trust you, but want to work alongside you, to be your friend and ally.

You feel like you understand them too, perhaps finding a little something in them that you also find in yourself, and this makes your bond even closer.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. That character seems to disturb your creatures in a way that you can't explain. You know that you must keep your animals away from them if possible, or you might lose control.
2. Pick one other PC. The creature that you're bonded with seems to have a special bond with this other person as well. You must decide whether it brings up feelings of jealousy or camaraderie within you and whether to thwart the connection or help it blossom.
3. Pick one other PC. Recently, they accidentally (or perhaps intentionally) put your beast companion in a position of danger. Your companion is now nervous around them, and you are struggling with your own emotional response to the incident.
4. Pick one other PC. They dislike beasts of all kinds, seeing them as little more than food or prey. You hope that exposing them to your beast companion will change their mind. It's up to that player how their character responds to the experience.

Additional Equipment: You have three days' worth of food for your beast companion, plus a harness, collar, or similar accoutrement.

GM Intrusions: Many people and communities are reluctant to trust or welcome dangerous animals and look warily

Beast Shape, page 85

It's up to the GM what constitutes an animal or nonhuman creature, but it's likely that very intelligent creatures as well as very ancient and powerful creatures do not fall into these categories.

Free level of Effort, page 132

*A creature that takes animal form with **Lend Beast Shape** counts as an animal for the use of **Animal Scrying**.*

A beast companion cannot grant an asset to a character's attacks or defense until the beast is level 3 or higher. Some character abilities might grant a special exception to this rule.

on those who consort with such creatures. Out-of-control beasts can be a real hazard. Missing or injured animals can take an emotional toll.

Tier 1: Beast Companion. A level 2 creature of your size or smaller accompanies you and follows your instructions. You and the GM must work out the details of your creature, and you'll probably make rolls for it in combat or when it takes actions. The beast companion acts on your turn. As a level 2 creature, it has a target number of 6 and 6 health, and it inflicts 2 points of damage. Its movement is based on its creature type (avian, swimmer, and so on). If your beast companion dies, you can hunt in the wild for 1d6 days to find a new one. Enabler.

Tier 2: Soothe the Savage (2 Intellect points). You calm a nonhuman beast within a short distance. You must speak to it (although it doesn't need to understand your words), and it must see you. It remains calm for one minute or for as long as you focus all

your attention on it. The GM has final say over what counts as a nonhuman beast, but unless some kind of deception is at work, you should know whether you can affect a creature before you attempt to use this ability on it. Action.

Communication (2 Intellect points). You can convey a basic concept to a creature that normally can't speak or understand speech. The creature can also give you a very basic answer to a simple question. Action.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Mount or Stronger Together as your tier 3 ability.

Mount. A level 3 creature serves you as a mount and follows your instructions. While you're mounted on it, the creature can move and you can attack on your turn, which provides an asset to your attack. You and the GM must work out the details of the creature, and you'll probably make rolls for it when it takes noncombat actions. The mount acts on your turn. If your mount dies, you can hunt in the wild for 3d6 days to find a new one. Enabler.



Stronger Together. When you and your beast are within immediate distance of each other, you inflict 2 additional points of damage when you attack and both of you gain an asset to defense actions. Enabler.

Tier 4: Beast Eyes (3 Intellect points). You can sense through your beast companion's senses if it is within 1 mile (1.5 km) of you. This effect lasts up to ten minutes. Action to establish.

Improved Companion. Your beast companion increases to level 4. As a level 4 creature, it has a target number of 12 and 12 health, and it inflicts 4 points of damage (though in most cases, instead of attacking, it provides an asset to your attacks). Enabler.

Tier 5: Beast Call (5 Intellect points). You summon a horde of small animals or a single level 4 beast to help you temporarily. These creatures do your bidding for as long as you focus your attention, but you must use your action each turn to direct them. Creatures are native to the area and arrive under their own power, so if you're in an unreachable place, this ability won't work. Action.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either As If One Creature or Control the Savage as your tier 6 ability. Whichever one you choose, you also get Powerful Companion.

As If One Creature. When you and your beast are within immediate distance of each other, you can share damage inflicted on either of you. For instance, if one of you is struck by a weapon for 4 points of damage, divide the damage between the two of you as you see fit. Only the Armor and resistances of the target initially damaged come into play. So if you have 2 Armor and are struck by a witch's fire spell for 4 points of damage, your beast can take the 2 points of damage you would suffer, but their Armor does not come into play, nor does their immunity to fire (if any). Enabler.

Control the Savage (6 Intellect points). You can control a calm nonhuman beast within a short distance. You control it for as long as you focus all your attention on it, using your turn each round. The GM has final say over what counts as a nonhuman beast, but unless some kind of deception is at work, you should know whether you can affect a creature before you attempt to use this ability on it. Action.

Powerful Companion. Your beast companion increases to level 5. As a level 5 creature, it has a target number of 15 and 15 health, and it inflicts 5 points of damage. Enabler.

CANNOT ESCAPE THE DARKNESS

You are haunted by a deep and endless shadow, a violent and destructive force that swirls within you always. This darkness is not evil, but it's ancient, all-knowing, and more powerful than you understand. It gives you unique abilities, but it takes from you too. Many who Cannot Escape the Darkness get their powers from **the Inner Dark**, but that's not the only option—there are far more shades of darkness than we know. Perhaps you chose this entanglement. Perhaps it chose you. Maybe you delved too deep and woke something that was never meant to be woken. Or maybe you've never known a life without it.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. This character is also slightly affected by the darkness. You both gain +1 on any die rolls when you collaborate on the same task, fight the same foe, and so on.
2. Pick one other PC. You're certain this character appreciates your abilities and is impressed by them. This may or may not actually be the case.
3. Pick one other PC. This person always seems to see you, even when you're totally cloaked by darkness.
4. Pick one other PC. This character once flashed a cypher in your eyes so brightly that you were blinded for several days. You recovered, but you keep an eye on this character, just in case.

GM Intrusions: Darkness skulks away as if possessed by a mind of its own.

Tier 1: Ribbons of Darkness (2 Intellect points). For the next minute, darkness condenses within an area within long range that is no bigger than an immediate distance in diameter, manifesting as swirling ribbons. All tasks attempted by creatures in the area are hindered, and leaving the area requires the creature's entire action to move. You can dismiss the darkness early as an action. Action to initiate.

The Inner Dark, page 188



Kyle agreed to let Cletus finish out the week, and so he did, the burden of his responsibilities an extra weight on his shoulders as he dug deep into the mountain on those last few days. He was sick, sick and tired—so very tired—and he began to worry how Ruby would get on without him, his thoughts running circles like a rat in his brain, chewing, chewing, chewing to find a way out. He found himself wandering deeper into the mine, away from the other men, where he could work uninterrupted, alone with his thoughts.

—Season 1, Episode 3: The Covenant

Free level of Effort, page 132

Tier 2: Void Wings (3 Intellect points).

Seething, swirling tendrils of shadow grasp you and lift you up, allowing you to fly for one round as quickly as you can move. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Dark Tangle or Shroud of Darkness as your tier 3 ability.

Dark Tangle (4 Intellect points). When you attack a foe within long range, the darkness condenses around your target and entangles its limbs, holding it in place and easing your attack by two steps. The ability works for whatever kind of attack you use (melee, ranged, energy, and so on). Enabler.

Shroud of Darkness (4 Intellect points). Ribbons of darkness condense and swirl about you for up to one minute. This shroud eases your Speed defense tasks, inflicts 2 points of damage to anyone who tries to touch you or strike you with a melee attack, and gives you +1 Armor. Action to initiate.

Tier 4: Dark Mount. A level 3 creature of the darkness serves you as a mount and follows your instructions. While you're mounted on it, the creature can move and you can attack on your turn, which provides an asset to your attack. You and the GM must work out the details of the creature, and you'll probably make rolls for it when it takes noncombat actions. The mount acts on your turn. If your mount dies, you can perform a ritual for 1d6 days to call upon another supernatural mount. Enabler.

Tier 5: Embrace the Darkness (5 Intellect points). For the next minute, you cover yourself with a shell of darkness. Your appearance becomes a dark silhouette, and you gain an asset to sneaking tasks and gain +1 to your Armor. The shell works seamlessly

with your desires, and if you apply a level of Effort to any physical task while the shell persists, you can apply an additional **free level of Effort** to that same task. Action to initiate.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Bind to the Darkness or Dark Structure as your tier 6 ability.

Bind to the Darkness (7+ Intellect points). You bind to a truly horrifying creature made of swirling ribbons of darkness and launch it at your foes within long range. Each round, you can attack within long range using the creature as your weapon. When you attack, the creature inserts hair-fine tendrils of shadow into the target's eyes and brain. The target takes 3 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) and is stunned for one round so that it loses its next turn. Alternatively, you can ask the creature to take other actions, as long as you are able to see it and mentally control it as your action. The creature disperses after about a minute. Action to initiate.

Dark Structure (5 Intellect points). You can form dark matter into a large structure consisting of up to ten 10-foot (3 m) cubes. The structure can be somewhat complex, though everything has the same matte black color from which no light shines. Otherwise, the structure can possess different densities, textures, and capacities. This means it can include windows, doors with locks, furnishings, and even decor, as long as it is all black as pitch. For example, you could shape the dark matter into a large, defensible structure; a sturdy 100-foot (30 m) bridge; or anything similar. The structure is a level 6 creation and lasts for 24 hours. You can't keep more than one such structure solid at any one time. Action.

CRAFTS POWERFUL OBJECTS

You're a crafter, but not just any crafter. Everything you make's got a touch of magic, a drop of power, a weave of wonder. Cyphers and artifacts are likely your bread and butter, but you can make, repair, or boost almost anything if given enough time and materials. You also always seem to know the best places to stock up on supplies, whether that's herbs and animal parts or more unusual and hard-to-find items.

You might have learned a lot of what you know at your mamaw's knee, or maybe you just took to it naturally, but the more you practice, the better you get. And the more powerful and magical your crafted items become.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. They commissioned you to craft something for them. You've already been paid but haven't yet completed the job.

2. Pick one other PC. That character always recognizes your creations, even if it's an item you crafted years ago.

3. Pick one other PC. One of your creations inadvertently harmed them in some way, and you're not sure they've ever forgiven you.

4. Pick one other PC. You recently had a possession go missing, and you're becoming convinced that they took it. Whether or not they did is up to them.

Additional Equipment: You have a bag of tools and a notebook for recording recipes, materials, and so on. You also start with materials sufficient to **craft one cypher**.

GM Intrusions: The object malfunctions, breaks, or suffers catastrophic or unexpected failure.

Tier 1: Magic Crafter. You are trained in crafting cyphers and artifacts. Enabler.

Supply Finder. You are trained in finding and identifying crafting materials, including herbs, animal parts, magical items, and so on. Enabler.

Tier 2: Cypher Tinkerer. If you spend at least one hour tinkering with a cypher in your possession, it functions at one level higher than normal. If you have time, you can do this for all of your cyphers, but they retain this bonus only for you (in the hands of someone else, they function at their normal level). Enabler.

Quick Work (3+ Intellect points). One use of any artifact (or one minute of an artifact

with a continuous function) is increased by one level if you use it within the next minute. If you spend 4 additional Intellect points, the use is increased by two levels if you use it within the next minute. Action.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose between Expert Crafter or Master Magic Crafter as your tier 3 ability.

Expert Crafter. Instead of rolling, you can choose to automatically succeed on a crafting task you're trained in. The task must be difficulty 4 or lower. Enabler.

Master Magic Crafter. You are specialized in crafting cyphers and artifacts. Enabler.

Tier 4: Cyphersmith. All cyphers you use function at one level higher than normal. If given a week and the right tools and materials, you can change one of your cyphers, transforming it into another cypher of the same type that you had in the past. The GM and player should collaborate to ensure that the transformation is logical. For example, you probably couldn't turn a **black lung** into an **augury**, but you could conceivably turn a **blackout creek** into a **snakebite tincture** (and vice versa). Enabler.

Cypher Mastery. You've learned how to create and carry cyphers so they're less likely to interact with each other in a dangerous way. You can bear one additional cypher (beyond your regular limit) at a time. So if you could normally bear three, you can now bear four. If you normally bear four, you can now bear five. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Maximize Cypher or Creation as your tier 6 ability.

Maximize Cypher. Choose one cypher you bear. Its level becomes the maximum level possible for that cypher. For example, a **bunting crown** has a level range of 1d6 + 1, so maximizing that cypher changes its level to 7. You can have only one maximized cypher at a time. You can't use this ability again until after you've taken a ten-hour recovery action. Enabler.

Creation. You can create new cyphers and artifacts in half the time, as if they were two levels lower. Enabler.



Black lung, page 316

Augury, page 315

Blackout creek, page 316

Snakebite tincture, page 327

Crafting Cyphers and Artifacts, page 152

Bunting crown, page 316

CURES WHAT AILS YA

You are a miracle to those who need a helping hand, a healing touch, or even a return to life itself. Your ability to heal others, as well as yourself, is built of a little knowledge, a little kindness, and a whole lot of magic. Whether you choose to tell others about that last bit or not is up to you.

Thanks to your abilities, you are likely beloved by all, and your skills are much sought after wherever you go.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. This character quietly suspects that you're either some type of god or a supernatural being.

2. Pick one other PC. This person knows a secret of yours, and you desperately hope that they don't tell anyone. You can choose whether or not they're aware that you know.

3. Pick one other PC. This character believes that you cured a family member of a deadly disease, and they're grateful. You aren't sure whether you actually helped or if that person wasn't as sick as was thought.

4. Pick one other PC. Sometime in that character's past, they had a devastating experience while attempting something that you do as a matter of course thanks to your focus. Whether they choose to tell you about it is up to them.

Additional Equipment: You carry a pouch or bag of various herbs, potions, tonics, powders, and so on.

GM Intrusions: Attempts to heal might cause harm instead. A community or individual needs a healer so desperately that they hold one against their will. Some might fear your power, even as you try to help them.

Tier 1: Perfect Remedy (1 Intellect point).

With the right herbs, words, or ritual, you restore 1d6 points to one stat Pool of any creature within immediate range. NPCs targeted by this ability regain 1d6 health points. Perfect Remedy can be used only once per character until that character uses their ten-hour rest, at which point it can be used again. Action.

Tier 2: Alleviate (3 Intellect points). You attempt to cancel or cure one malady (such as disease or poison) in one creature. Action.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Font of Healing or Miraculous Health as your tier 3 ability.

Font of Healing. With your approval, other creatures can touch you and regain 1d6 points to either their Might Pool or their Speed Pool. This healing costs them 2 Intellect points. A single creature can benefit from this ability only once each day. Enabler.

Miraculous Health. When you would descend a step on the damage track, you can attempt a Might task to resist, with a difficulty equal to the level of the foe or effect that harmed you. If successful, you don't descend the step and you regain 1 point in any Pool that has 0 points. You can't use this ability again until after your next ten-hour rest. Enabler.

Tier 4: Ounce of Prevention (4 Intellect points). You sometimes can sense a wound before it's delivered or get a glimpse of a terrible illness coming around the bend. If you focus, you can try to help those you care about stay out of harm's way. One creature

When Font of Healing is used, describe the sensation and visual effects you think are appropriate, if any.



She woke covered in blood. Not just blood but it was part of a mixture of burdock root, crawley root, and smooth pigweed—all things used to heal and soothe, but mixed with this tainted blood it was a corruption of the plants, a corruption of the Green's healing . . . and it was all over her. She looked around, trying to get her bearings and realized she didn't need to. She was home. She was lying in the yard of her own house in the valley where all of this began. She saw Sixy and Gene—both spattered in blood, which apparently came from Doc Gillespie, who lay dead a little ways behind them. Sixy's hands were sticky with the plant medicine. They stared blankly at her.

—Season 1, Episode 10: The Witch Queen Chapter III: Last Harbor

you choose within short range is granted an additional, immediate action, which they can take out of turn. The creature uses the additional action however they wish. Action.

Tier 5: Restoration (6 Intellect points). You restore points to a target's Might or Speed Pool in one of two ways: either the chosen Pool regains up to 6 points, or it's restored to a total value of 12. You make this decision when you initiate this ability. Points are regenerated at a rate of 1 per round. You must remain within immediate range of the target the whole time, either touching them or conversing with them. In no case can this raise a Pool higher than its maximum. Action.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Greater Healing Touch or Restore Life as your tier 6 ability.

Greater Healing Touch (4 Intellect points). You touch a creature and restore their Might Pool, Speed Pool, and Intellect Pool to their maximum values, as if they were fully rested. A single creature can benefit from this ability only once each day. Action.

Restore Life (9+ Intellect points). You can attempt to restore life to a dead creature of up to level 3, as long as the body is no more than a day old and is mostly intact. You can also attempt to restore life to a body that is much older but is especially well preserved. The difficulty of the Intellect task is equal to the level of the creature you're attempting to restore to life. For each additional level of Effort applied, you can attempt to restore the life of a creature whose level is 1 higher. If you use this ability on a PC, it works automatically but only once in the PC's lifetime.

Those who come back to life are dazed for at least a day, and all tasks they attempt are hindered. Action; one minute to initiate.

DEFENDS WHAT MATTERS

You believe in standing up for and protecting the people and places that mean something to you—or even to those you don't know well but who seem like they could use your help. You're the first to come to their aid when you see them in trouble. You might donate your time and skills to help build a community center, take a beating to save a person from the same, or rally your friends to take on injustice wherever you find it.

You probably bear some scars from previous conflicts, but for each scar, you've also likely gotten a token of gratitude. This might be something physical, like a delivery of a hand-cooked meal or a cypher, or it might be general well-wishing from those around you.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. You failed to protect this character at some point in the past, and you feel compelled to make up for your failure.

2. Pick one other PC. This character claimed innocence during a long-ago event, and you protected them. Now that time has passed, you're not entirely convinced that they were blameless.

3. Pick two other PCs. They seem to think that you're more of an arbitrator than you really are, and they keep asking you to choose which one of them is correct.

4. Pick one other PC. They believe that one of the tokens of gratitude you carry came from a member of their family.

GM Intrusions: A character focused on protecting others may periodically leave themselves vulnerable to attacks.

A ward is injured or threatened, distracting the character from their task.



The GM and player should work together to establish whether the character has a strong connection to a particular community. For example, the character probably has a strong connection to the place they were born and raised, the place they live now, or a place that they've been working with as part of their character arc.

Character arc, page 162

Guarding, page 155

Draw the attack, page 150

Take the attack, page 151

Tier 1: Courageous. You are trained in Intellect defense tasks and initiative tasks. Enabler.

Community Activist. When speaking to others in a community you have a strong connection to, you are trained in persuasion and intimidation tasks about topics that directly relate to the community. Enabler.

Tier 2: Devoted Defender (2 Might or Intellect points). Choose one character you can see. That character becomes your ward. You are trained in all tasks involving finding, healing, interacting with, and protecting them. You can have only one ward at a time. Action to initiate.

Community Protector. Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Dual Wards or True Guardian as your tier 3 ability.

Dual Wards. You can have two wards from Devoted Defender at a time. Choosing a second ward can be its own action, or you can choose two wards with one action (and only pay the cost once for doing so). Benefits provided by Devoted Defender apply to both your wards as long as they remain within an immediate distance of each other; if your wards separate, you choose which retains the benefit. If they come back together, both regain the benefit immediately. Enabler.

True Guardian (2 Might or Intellect points). When you **stand guard** as your action, allies within immediate range of you gain an asset to their defense tasks. This lasts until the end of your next turn. Enabler.

Tier 4: Combat Challenge. All attempted tasks that **draw an attack** to yourself (and away from someone else) are eased by two steps. Enabler.

Tier 5: Willing Sacrifice. When you **take an attack** meant for another character, you know how to take the attack in a way that minimizes its effect. The attack automatically strikes you, but instead of taking 1 additional point of damage, you take

1 less point of damage (to a minimum of 1 point). Additionally, you can take more than one attack in a given round provided that all the attacks were originally meant for one target. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Share Defense or True Defender as your tier 6 ability.

Share Defense. If your training in a defense task is greater than that of an ally within short range, your advice and insight allow them to substitute your training for that defense task. Enabler.

True Defender (6 Might or Intellect points). This ability functions as your tier 2 Devoted Defender ability, except the benefit applies to up to three characters you choose. If you choose just one character, you become specialized in the tasks described under the Devoted Defender ability. Action to initiate.

DELVES THE DARKNESS

You know there are people out there who love the wide-open sky, standing on a mountaintop and being on top of the world, but that's not you. Give you the hollers, the tunnels, the mining shafts, the caves deep underground. So many dark places to explore, with all their gloom and press, that some days you can't remember what it feels like to have the sun on your face or the wind in your hair. And that's mostly fine by you.

You spend so much time in the darkness that you've begun to adapt to it, nearly becoming a creature of the shadow yourself.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. This character was your companion on previous expeditions, and the two of you work so well together that you both gain an asset to any die rolls to collaborate on the same task, fight the same foe, and so on.

2. Pick two other PCs. You're pretty sure you encountered them both in the dark once, doing something illegal. You can choose whether or not to share that information. The characters can choose whether it was really them (it could have been neither, one, or both), and they may or may not share that information in return.

3. Pick one other PC. This person always seems to hear you, no matter how stealthy you try to be.

4. Pick one other PC. This character is so loud in everything they do that you feel obligated to try to help them learn to move more quietly through the world. Whether or not they're interested is up to them.

Additional Equipment: You start with a **travel pack**. If you already have one, you can instead take an extra 15 feet (15 m) of rope, rations for two more days, and a lantern.

Darkness Powers: Your special abilities make almost no sound, and whatever visual displays they produce are dark and shadowy. These alterations change nothing other than the appearance of the effects.

GM Intrusions: Sometimes items fall out of pockets or bags in the dark, never to be found again. Or at least, not to be found by the one who lost them. You're not the only one who knows how to hide in the darkness.

Tier 1: Superb Explorer. You are trained in searching, listening, climbing, balancing, and jumping tasks. Enabler.

Tier 2: Superb Infiltrator. You are trained in lockpicking and tinkering with devices in an effort to make them work, or at least work for you. Enabler.

Eyes Adjusted. You can see in extremely dim light as though it were bright light. You can see in total darkness as if it were extremely dim. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Nightstrike or Slippery Customer as your tier 3 ability.

Nightstrike. When you attack a foe in dim light or darkness, you get a **free level of Effort** on the attack. Enabler.

Slippery Customer. When you apply Effort to tasks involving escaping from bonds, fitting in tight spaces, and other contortionist tasks, you get a free level of Effort on the task. Thanks to your experience, you are also trained in Speed defense tasks while wearing light armor or no armor. Enabler.

Tier 4: Resilient. In your explorations of dark places, you've been exposed to all sorts of terrible things and are developing a general resistance. You gain +1 to Armor and are trained in Might defense tasks. Enabler.

Tier 5: Dark Explorer. You ignore penalties for any action (including fighting) in extremely dim light or in cramped spaces. Combined with your Eyes Adjusted ability, you can act without penalty even in total darkness. You are trained in sneaking tasks while in dim or no light. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Blinding Attack or Embraced by Darkness as your tier 6 ability.

Blinding Attack (3 Speed points). If you have a source of light, you can use it to make a melee attack against a target. If successful, the attack deals no damage, but the target is blinded for one minute, hindering all of their actions by two steps. Action.

Embraced by Darkness (6 Intellect points). For the next hour, you take on some characteristics of a shadow thanks to a discovery or connection made while exploring the dark. Your appearance is a dark silhouette. When you apply a level of Effort to sneaking tasks, you get a free level of Effort on the task. During this time, you can move through the air at a rate of a short distance per round, and you can move through solid barriers (even those that are sealed to prevent the passage of light or shadow), but not energy barriers, at a rate of 1 foot (30 cm) per round. You can perceive while passing through a barrier or object, which allows you to peek through walls. As a shadow, you can't affect or be affected by normal matter. Likewise, you can't attack, touch, or otherwise affect anything. However, magical attacks and effects can affect you, and sudden bursts of light can potentially make you lose your next turn. Action to initiate.

Travel pack, page 121

Free level of Effort, page 132

DOES WHAT NEEDS DOIN'

You're the one everyone leans on in a pinch. And beyond that, you're the one who's often behind the scenes fixing things and setting them right without most people even hearing a whiff about it. You know what needs doing, and if it's something you can handle with your hands, you just go ahead and make sure it gets done, whether that's helping build your neighbor's fence, fixing machinery at the mine, driving someone where they need to go, or handling less palatable tasks like moving bodies.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. You feel like they're just a little bit lazy and could benefit from your work ethic (whether they agree or not is up to them).
2. Pick one other PC. That character has a habit that annoys you, but you're otherwise quite impressed with their abilities.
3. Pick one other PC. They're always trying to get you to take some time for yourself and have some fun, but their idea of a good time scares (or perhaps bores) you a little.
4. Pick one other PC. They owe you a significant amount of money.

GM Intrusions: So many people relying on you can add pressure. Repairs and tasks sometimes fail, especially when rushed.

Tier 1: Useful. You've got lots of hands-on experience and are trained in tasks related to three areas of hands-on skills, such as carrying, carpentry, driving, making moonshine, running machinery, plumbing, or electrical repair. Enabler.

Tier 2: Muscles of Iron (2 Might points).

For the next ten minutes, all Might-based actions other than attack rolls that you attempt are eased. If you already have this ability from another source, the effect lasts for one hour instead of ten minutes. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose between Eye for Detail or Improvise as your tier 3 ability.

Eye for Detail (2 Intellect points). When you spend five minutes or so thoroughly exploring an area no larger than a short distance in diameter, you can ask the GM one question about the area. The GM must answer you truthfully. You can't use this more than one time per area per 24 hours. Action to initiate; five minutes to complete.

Improvise (3 Intellect points). When you perform a task in which you are not trained, you can improvise to gain an asset on the task. The asset might be a tool you cobble together, a sudden insight into overcoming a problem, or a rush of dumb luck. Enabler.

Tier 4: Enhanced Might. You gain 3 points to your Might Pool. Enabler.

Calloused. You've grown tough in your years of doing what's needed. You have +1 to Armor against any kind of physical damage, even damage that normally ignores Armor. Enabler.

Tier 5: Expert Skill. Instead of rolling a d20, you can choose to automatically succeed on a task that you're trained in. The task must be difficulty 4 or lower, and it can't be an attack roll or a defense roll. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Greater Enhanced Potential or Multitask as your tier 6 ability.

Greater Enhanced Potential. You gain 6 points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

Multitask (6 Intellect points). You've become so skilled at doing what needs to be done that you can take two separate actions this round. The actions should be something that are possible within the constraints of space and time. For example, you can't drive a car and build a fence. But you could drive a car and shoot a gun. Or drive a car twice as far as normal. Or drive a car and try to heal the person in the seat next to you. Enabler.



FEARS NO HAINTS

You're no stranger to death, but death isn't where your focus or strengths truly lie. Instead, you look to those who've long crossed that threshold—the spirits, the haints, the ghosts, and those who have no name or form—for they hold great secrets and great power. You've found that treating them with respect goes a long way, and when that doesn't work, well, there's no harm in a tiny sprinkle of deception or intimidation added to the mix.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. You saved them from a spirit attack, and they owe you their life.
2. Pick one other PC. You have known that character for a while, and they helped you gain control of your focus-related abilities.
3. Pick one other PC. You accidentally learned something they were trying to keep a secret.
4. Pick one other PC. This character has a habit that annoys you, but you're otherwise quite impressed with their abilities.

GM Intrusions: Some people don't trust those who deal with spirits. The dead sometimes don't want to get involved.

Tier 1: Question the Spirits (2 Intellect points). You call a spirit to you and petition it to answer a few questions (usually no more than three before the spirit fades).

First, you must summon a spirit. If it's a spirit of the dead, you must have personally known the creature, have an object that was owned by the creature, or touch the physical remains of the creature. For other spirits, you must know the spirit's full name or have a great deal of an element (such as fire or earth) that the spirit is associated with.

If the spirit responds, it can manifest as an insubstantial shade that answers for itself, it can inhabit an object or any remains you provide, or it can manifest as an invisible presence that you speak for.

The spirit might not wish to answer your questions, in which case you must persuade it to help. You can attempt to psychically wrestle the spirit into submission (an Intellect task), or you can try diplomacy, deception, or blackmail ("Answer me, or I'll tell your children that you were a philanderer" or "I'll destroy this relic that belonged to you").

The GM determines what the spirit might know, based on the knowledge it possessed in life. Action to initiate.

Tier 2: Spirit Accomplice. A level 3 spirit accompanies you and follows your instructions. The spirit must remain within immediate range—if it moves farther away, it fades at the end of your following turn and can't return for a day. You and the GM must work out the details of your spirit accomplice, and you'll probably make rolls for it when it takes actions. The spirit accomplice acts on your turn, can move a short distance each round, and exists partially out of phase (allowing it to move through walls, though it makes a poor porter). The spirit takes up residence in an object you designate, and it manifests as either an invisible presence or a ghostly shade. Your spirit accomplice is specialized in one knowledge skill the GM determines.

The spirit is normally insubstantial, but if you use an action and spend 3 Intellect points, it accretes enough substance to affect the world around it. As a level 3 creature with substance, it has a target number of 9 and 9 health. It doesn't attack creatures, but while substantial, it can use its action to serve as an asset for any one attack you make on your turn.

While corporeal, the spirit can't move through objects or fly. A spirit remains corporeal for up to ten minutes at a time, but fades back to being insubstantial if not actively engaged. If your spirit accomplice is destroyed, it reforms in 1d6 days, or you can attract a new spirit in 2d6 days. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Command Spirit or Reading the Room as your tier 3 ability.

Command Spirit (3 Intellect points). You can command a spirit or animated dead creature of up to level 5 within short range. If you succeed, the target can't attack you for one minute, during which time it follows your verbal commands if it can hear and understand you. Action to initiate.

Reading the Room (3 Intellect points). You gain knowledge about an area by speaking with spirits or reading residual energies from the past. You can ask the GM one matter-of-fact question about the



location and get an answer if you succeed on the Intellect roll. “What killed the cattle in this barn?” is a good example of a simple question. “Why were these cattle killed?” is not an appropriate question because it has more to do with the mindset of the killer than the barn. Simple questions usually have a difficulty of 2, but extremely technical questions or those that involve facts meant to be kept secret can have a much higher difficulty. Action.

Tier 4: Spirit Cloak. At your command, the spirit from your Spirit Accomplice ability wraps itself around you for up to ten minutes. The spirit automatically inflicts 4 points of damage to anyone who tries to touch you or strike you with a melee attack. While the spirit cloak is active, all tasks to evade the perceptions of others are eased. Enabler.

Tier 5: Call Dead Spirit (6 Intellect points). At your touch, the remains of a creature dead no longer than seven days appears as a manifest (and apparently physical) spirit,

whose level is the same as it had in life. The raised spirit persists for up to a day (or less, if it accomplishes something important to it before then), after which it fades away and can’t return again. The raised spirit remembers everything it knew in life and possesses most of its previous abilities (though not necessarily its equipment).

In addition, it gains the ability to become insubstantial as an action for up to a minute at a time. The raised spirit is not beholden to you, and it doesn’t need to stay near you to remain manifest. Action to initiate.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Call Otherworldly Spirit or Infuse Spirit as your tier 6 ability.

Call Otherworldly Spirit (6 Intellect points). You summon a spirit creature that manifests for up to a day (or less, if it accomplishes something important to it before then), after which it fades away and can’t be summoned again. The spirit is a creature of level 6 or lower, and it can be substantial or insubstantial as it wishes (using an action to

When a dead spirit is called, it's likely to have a unique personality, a name, and perhaps even unfinished business that it might relate to the character.

change). The spirit is not beholden to you, and it doesn't need to stay near you to remain manifest. Action to initiate.

Infuse Spirit. When you kill a creature or destroy a spirit with an attack, if you choose, its spirit (if unprotected) immediately infuses you, and you regain 1d6 points to one of your Pools (your choice). The spirit is stored within you, which means it can't be questioned, raised, or restored to life by any means unless you allow it. Enabler.

GETS ROUGH AND ROWDY

Other people use weapons and you (probably) don't give them too much grief over it, but that's not for you. Instead, you are the weapon. You and your body work together better than most, and you don't care who knows it. You're always ready to throw a punch, throw a body, or watch your foes throw a tantrum when you beat them and their precious weapon fair and square.

How did your body come to be such a weapon? Maybe you trained since you were little. Maybe you got a gift from someone in your past or present. Maybe it's magic. Whatever it is, you know others fear you and maybe even revere you a little, and you've decided you're mighty fine with that.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. They seem to believe that the only true weapons are those that you can hold in your hand, and they might look at you with disdain.

2. Pick one other PC. This character seems incredibly unaware of their body and always happens to get in your way. If you miss your foe and accidentally hit someone else in close range, it's likely to be them.

3. Pick one other PC. You once trained with a close friend of theirs, and you owe that mutual friend much.

4. Pick two other PCs. Once these two heard about your skills, they expressed interest in being your students. However, only one seems to have any aptitude.

GM Intrusions: Striking certain foes hurts you as much as it hurts them. Opponents with weapons have greater reach. Fighting dirty opens the door to your opponents to do the same.

Tier 1: Fists of Fury. You inflict 2 additional points of damage with unarmed attacks. Enabler.

Flesh of Stone. You have +1 to Armor if you don't wear physical armor. Enabler.

Tier 2: Gouger (2 Speed points). You make an unarmed attack against a creature with an eye. The attack is hindered, but if you hit, the creature has trouble seeing for the next hour. During this time, its tasks that rely on sight (which is most tasks) are hindered. Action.

Unarmed Fighting Style. You are trained in unarmed attacks. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose between Perfect Weapon or Unarmed Tackle as your tier 3 ability.

Perfect Weapon. You gain 6 points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

Unarmed Tackle (3+ Might points). If you successfully hit a foe with an unarmed attack, you knock them prone in addition to inflicting damage. The target must be your size or smaller. You can knock down a target larger than you if you apply a level of Effort to do so (rather than to ease the attack). Enabler.

Tier 4: Deflect Attacks (4 Speed points).

For one minute, you automatically deflect or dodge any ranged projectile attacks. However, on your next turn after you're attacked with ranged projectiles, all your other actions are hindered. Action to initiate.

Tier 5: Use What You Got (4 Intellect points).

You find some way to use the environment to your advantage in a fight. For the next ten minutes, your attack rolls and Speed defense rolls are eased. Action to initiate.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either No Holds Barred or Mess You Up as your tier 6 ability.

No Holds Barred. You are specialized in unarmed attacks. If you are already specialized in unarmed attacks, you instead deal 2 additional points of damage with unarmed attacks. Enabler.

Mess You Up. When you hit with an unarmed attack, you inflict an additional 5 points of damage. Enabler.

HUNTS

There's things that move in the woods—creatures natural and not—and you've got the skills and know-how to not just find them, but to bring them down if needs must. Or maybe you use your skills to track down people, working for the law or for more nefarious employers. Whatever you hunt, you do so with enough skill and power that your quarry knows to be wary, and your friends and the powers that be know to turn to you when they need something found.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. That person once saw you show surprising mercy toward your prey, and now you hope they keep it quiet—it might harm your reputation.
2. Pick one other PC. You accidentally caught them in one of your traps, and they had to get free.
3. Pick one other PC. Back in your bounty hunter days (which may or may not be over), you were hired to track down someone who was close to this character.
4. Pick one other PC. You've noticed that it's almost impossible to track this character, but you're determined to figure out a way.

Additional Equipment: You have boots that muffle your footsteps, giving you an asset on any roll made involving sneaky movement.

GM Intrusions: Even the slightest noise or movement can alert the quarry that it's being hunted. Friends and family members hold grudges or step in to protect the person you're hunting.

Tier 1: Tracker. You are trained in following and identifying tracks. Enabler.

Tier 2: Stalker. You gain an asset to all types of movement tasks (including climbing, swimming, jumping, and balancing). Enabler.

Sneak. You ease stealth and initiative tasks. Enabler.

Quarry (2 Intellect points). Choose a quarry (a single individual creature that you can see). You are trained in all tasks involving following, understanding, interacting with, or fighting that creature. You can have only one quarry at a time. Action to initiate.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either From the Shadows or Skill With Attacks as your tier 3 ability.

From the Shadows. If attacking from a hidden vantage, with surprise, or before an opponent has acted, you get an asset on the attack. On a successful hit with this surprise attack, you inflict 3 additional points of damage. Enabler.

Skill With Attacks. Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

Tier 4: Knock Out (5+ Might points). You make a melee attack that inflicts no damage. Instead, if the attack hits, make a second Might-based roll. If successful, a foe of level 3 or lower is knocked unconscious for one minute. For each level of Effort used, you can affect one higher level of foe, or you can extend the duration for an additional minute. Action.

Tier 5: Hunter's Drive (5 Intellect points). Through force of will, when you wish it, you grant yourself greater prowess in the hunt for ten minutes. During this time, you gain an asset to all tasks involving your quarry, including attacks. Your quarry is the creature you selected with your second-tier Quarry ability. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Bring Them Down or Multiple Quarry as your tier 6 ability.

Bring Them Down (8+ Speed points). With a swift and sudden attack, you strike a foe in a vital spot. If the target is level 4 or lower, it is killed outright. For each additional level of Effort you apply, you can increase the level of the target by 1. Action.

Multiple Quarry (6 Intellect points). This ability functions like your second-tier Quarry ability except that you can select up to three creatures as quarry. You must be able to see all three creatures when you initiate this ability. When you use your Hunter's Drive ability, it applies to all three creatures. Action to initiate.

KNOWS JACK

You don't really know Jack, but you'd sure like to. You bet you could learn a thing or six from that silver-tongued trickster. Not that you don't already have some tricks up your sleeve. You're stealthier than most, slipperier than a soap shadow, and a bit of a sweet-talker too. And you're not averse to borrowing a bit of whatever you need here or there, be it coins, a bit of someone's time, or even a heart or two. You're not evil, though. You just can't resist a bargain, trick, or opportunity to get what's yours (and what's theirs too).

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick two other PCs. They both seek hard-to-find goods (what the goods are is up to them) and you've helped them procure these items in the past.
2. Pick one other PC. You accidentally caught them in a trap you set, and they had to get free on their own.
3. Pick one other PC. Long ago, the two of you were on opposite sides of a conflict. You won, though you "cheated" in their eyes (but from your perspective, all's fair in love and war). They may still harbor ill will toward you.
4. Pick one other PC. That character always recognizes you or your handiwork, whether you're in disguise or are long gone when they arrive on the scene.

GM Intrusions: It can be hard to find or keep allies. Some secrets are better left unknown. Powerful enemies are made.

Tier 1: Stealth Skills. You are trained in your choice of two of the following skills: deception, disguise, lockpicking, pickpocketing, seeing through deception, sleight of hand, or stealth. You can choose this ability multiple times, but you must select different skills each time. Enabler.

Sense Attitudes. You are trained in sensing lies and whether a person is likely to (or already does) believe your lies. Enabler.

Tier 2: Impersonate (2 Intellect points). For one hour, you alter your voice, posture, and mannerisms, whip together a disguise, and gain an asset on an attempt to impersonate someone else, whether it is a specific individual (Timmy the blacksmith) or a general role (a blacksmith). Action to initiate.

Legerdemain (1 Speed point). You can perform small but seemingly impossible tricks. For example, you can make a small object in your hands disappear and move into a desired spot within reach (like your pocket). You can make someone believe that they have something in their possession that they do not have (or vice versa). You can switch similar objects right in front of someone's eyes. Action.

*J.T. Fields III aka Jack,
page 366*



Now, he'd been known by any number of names and faces over the course of time—a silver-tongued devil good for little more than getting into trouble, and as often not, leading other folks there with him. There was little he loved more than thumbing his nose at the high-and-mighty folk who thought they had something like power, and if those folks were your trouble, like as not, he could be just the sort of help you were looking for—if you caught him in the right mood, anyway. Trickster and thief, the stories of his adventures have been handed down for generations, even written down now and again. Some might say he would weave schemes like an old spider waiting to catch him some nice juicy flies, and others would say at the first sight of trouble, he'd light out yipping at the moon like an old coyote. And those things might be true, family, but in Paradise, if you're looking to rent a cheap house that may or may not be sound, dry rotted, or built atop an old graveyard; or trade a horse; or find the best shine in town—well, you could find this man in a small office in the E.W. King Building. See, back in the winter of 1928, he went by the name of Mr. J.T. Fields III, though to most folks who got to know him, he was simply . . . Jack.

—Season 2, Episode 26: Welcome to Paradise

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Grand Deception or Pull a Fast One as your tier 3 ability.

Grand Deception (3 Intellect points). You convince an intelligent creature that can understand you and isn't hostile of something that is wildly and obviously untrue. Action.

Pull a Fast One (3 Intellect points). When you're running a con, picking a pocket, fooling or tricking a dupe, sneaking something by a creature, and so on, you gain an asset on the task. Enabler.

Tier 4: Master Thief. You are trained in climbing, escaping from bonds, slipping through narrow places, and other contortionist moves. Enabler.

Tier 5: Trust to Luck (3 Intellect points). Sometimes, you've just got to roll the dice and hope things add up in your favor. When you use Trust to Luck, roll a d6. On any even result, the task you're attempting is eased by two steps. On a roll of 1, the task is hindered. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either All-Out Con or Brainwashing as your tier 6 ability.

All-Out Con (7 Intellect points). You put everything into it. You add three **free levels of Effort** to the next task you attempt. You can't use this ability again until after you've taken a ten-hour recovery action. Action.

Brainwashing (6+ Intellect points). You use trickery, well-spoken lies, and magic to make others temporarily do what you want them to do. You control the actions of another creature you touch. This effect lasts for one minute. The target must be level 3 or lower. You can allow it to act freely or override its control on a case-by-case basis as long as you can see it. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target or increase the duration by one minute. Thus, to control the mind of a level 6 target (three levels above the normal limit) or control a target for four minutes (three minutes above the normal duration), you must apply three levels of Effort. When the duration ends, the creature doesn't remember being controlled or anything it did while under your influence. Action to initiate.

KNOWS THE UNKNOWABLE

There is so much in this world to be uncovered and discovered, so many secrets to find and mysteries to unravel. Others might say that some things are better left buried, but that's not how you see it at all. You strive to name, know, and categorize all that you come across, but in particular those things that others classify as truly unknowable. You've likely got some magic tangled in your abilities that helps you see things in ways that others can't. Of course, even someone as focused and smart as you can't know everything—but you can certainly try.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. If it wasn't for you, they would never have made it through a difficult situation.
2. Pick one other PC. You figured out that they have a secret that they haven't told anyone yet. You don't know what that secret is, but you can tell it weighs on them.
3. Pick one other PC. Based on a couple of comments you've overheard, you suspect that this character thinks brawn and force, not reason, are the solution to most problems.

4. Pick one other PC. When this character stands next to you, you have a hard time concentrating. You're not sure why.

Additional Equipment: A journal where you can jot down your observations and analysis.

GM Intrusions: New knowledge brings unwelcome news. There's hubris in believing you know the unknowable, and that always seems to come back to bite you.

Tier 1: Applied Observation (2 Intellect points). You observe or study a creature, object, or location for at least one round. The next time you interact with it (possibly in the following round), a related task (such as persuading the creature, attacking it, or defending from its attack) is eased. Action.

Tier 2: See the Unseen. You can automatically perceive creatures and objects that are normally invisible or existing mainly as spirits or in a nonphysical state. When looking for things more conventionally hidden, the task is eased. Enabler.

Free level of Effort, page 132

Spirit Lore. You are trained in the names, habits, suspected lairs, and related topics regarding the magical and natural creatures of your world. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Creature Insight or Find the Hidden as your tier 3 ability.

Creature Insight (3 Intellect points).

When examining any nonhuman creature, you can ask the GM one question to gain an idea of its level, its capabilities, what it eats, what motivates it, what its weaknesses are (if any), how it can be placated, or any other similar query. This is for difficult or strange creatures beyond those readily identified by using skills. Action.

Find the Hidden (4+ Intellect points).

You see the tracteries of objects as they move through space and time. You can sense the distance and direction of any specific inanimate object that you once touched. This takes anywhere from one action to hours of concentration, depending on what the GM feels is appropriate due to time, distance, or other mitigating circumstances. However, you don't know in advance how long it will take. If you use at least two levels of Effort, once you have established the distance and direction, you remain in contact with the object for one hour per level of Effort used. Thus, if it moves, you are aware of its new position. Action to initiate; action each round to concentrate.

Tier 4: Scrying (6 Intellect points). With great concentration, you can see places other than where you stand now. This ability can be used in one of two ways:

- Distance and direction. Pick a spot a specific distance away and in a specific direction. For one minute, you can concentrate to see, hear, and smell from that vantage point. This ability doesn't grant you sensory capabilities beyond the norm.
- Think of a place you have seen before, either conventionally or using the other application of this power. For the next two rounds, you can concentrate to see, hear, and smell from that vantage point.

Either application takes anywhere from one action to hours of concentration, depending

on what the GM feels is appropriate due to time, distance, or other mitigating circumstances. However, you don't know in advance how long it will take. Action to initiate; action each round to concentrate.

Tier 5: Knowing the Unknown (6 Intellect points). By accessing the resources appropriate to your character, you can ask the GM one question and get a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. Gaining knowledge of the future is impossible. Action.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Deep Knowing or Share the Known as your tier 6 ability.

Deep Knowing. You've figured enough things out that you've achieved a new level of understanding. Choose any one skill (even a combat skill) that you're not already trained in; you become trained in that skill. Additionally, your Intellect Pool increases by 2, and your Intellect Edge increases by 1. Enabler.

Share the Known (5 Intellect points). You have learned so much that you can now share it with others to their benefit. When you speak with knowledge and confidence about something you've learned, all allies who hear you ease the next task they attempt within the next round. If the task is related to the subject of your shared knowledge, the task is eased by two steps. Action.

MAKES A HIGH LONESOME SOUND

Some might say you sing like an angel. Others, the devil. Or perhaps every time you pick up your fiddle and begin to play, the rumors start to swirl—whispers of crossroads and deals, tales of selling your soul. Did you make a deal? Who's to say? Maybe you just came by your gifts naturally.

Whether you're a musician, actor, storyteller, poet, or something else, you're a master entertainer, someone who moves others through the songs you sing or the stories you tell.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. This character is your worst critic. Your abilities to help or inspire others don't function for them.
2. Pick one other PC. They seem to really enjoy your attempts to entertain, and this brings out the performer in you. It's up to that character whether their appreciation is real or they're just being polite.
3. Pick one other PC. They're so inspired and put at ease by your stories or other forms of entertainment that when you use Levity, they gain +2 to their recovery rolls (instead of +1).
4. Pick one other PC. This person knows the secret to one of your favorite forms of entertainment. You worry constantly that they will steal it or reveal it.

Additional Equipment: You start with a musical instrument or other tools needed to perform.

GM Intrusions: The audience is annoyed or offended. Musical instruments break. The words to a story or song are forgotten.

Tier 1: Levity. Through wit, charm, humor, and grace, you are trained in all social interactions other than those involving coercion or intimidation. During rests, you put friends and comrades at ease so much that they gain +1 to their recovery rolls. Enabler.

Tier 2: Spin a Yarn. Through stories, songs, art, or other forms of entertainment, you inspire your friends. After spending 24 hours with you, once per day each of your friends can ease a task. This benefit is ongoing while you remain in the friend's company. It ends if you leave, but it resumes if you return to the friend's company within 24 hours. If you leave the friend's company for more than 24 hours, you must spend another 24 hours together to reactivate the benefit. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Knowledge or Multitalented as your tier 3 ability.

Knowledge. Your stories and songs contain truth. You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two areas of knowledge such as history, geography, archeology, and so on. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

Multitalented. Being well versed in how to entertain others is reflected in your growing capabilities. You gain 6 new points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

Tier 4: Calm (3 Intellect points). Through jokes, song, or other art, you prevent a living foe from attacking anyone or anything for one round. Action.

Tier 5: Able Assistance. When you help someone with a task and they apply a level of Effort, they get a **free level of Effort** on that task. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Master Entertainer or Vindictive Performance as your tier 6 ability.

Master Entertainer. Your Spin a Yarn ability works more effectively, easing your friends' tasks by two steps rather than one step. Enabler.

Free level of Effort, page 132



Vindictive Performance (5 Intellect points). When you tell a joke, perform a song or poem, draw a picture, relate an anecdote, or otherwise provide entertainment, you can select one individual from the audience who is able to understand you. During your performance, you heap indirect but biting derision on this target. If you succeed, the target doesn't realize that they've become the victim of your performance until you wrap up the entertainment at a moment you choose in a way that strikes home. The target suffers 6 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) and loses their next turn. One or more actions to initiate.

MANIFESTS THE MOUNTAIN

You don't have a care what sleeps beneath these mountains or what lies in their shadows. You care only for their rise, huge and majestic into that blue-pitched sky. For their strength and quiet power. For their promise to protect and peak eternal.

That's you too. You've got the size and strength to stand tall under anything trying to knock you down. Combine that with armor and training, and you're incredibly difficult to move or hurt. Even if you fall, you rise again, pushing up from the earth with awe-inspiring force.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. They're not blood family, but they're definitely kin, and you'd do anything to protect them.
2. Pick one other PC. Their occasional clumsiness and loud behavior irritate you.
3. Pick one other PC. You accidentally learned something they were trying to keep a secret.
4. Pick one other PC. You're pretty sure they're scared of you, but you don't know why.

Additional Equipment: You have a type of armor of your choice.

GM Intrusions: Armor is damaged. Small foes conspire in ingenious ways. Being knocked down is so rare that when it happens, you're shaken for a bit.

Tier 1: Practiced in Armor. You can wear armor for long periods of time without tiring and can compensate for slowed reactions from wearing armor. You reduce the **Speed cost for wearing armor** by 1. Enabler.

Experienced Defender. When wearing armor, you gain +1 to Armor. Enabler.

Tier 2: Resist the Elements. You resist heat, cold, and similar extremes. You gain +2 to Armor against ambient damage or other damage that would normally ignore Armor. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Like a Rock or Practiced With All Weapons as your tier 3 ability. Whichever one you choose, you also get Unmovable.

Like a Rock. You gain 6 points to your Might Pool. Enabler.

Practiced With All Weapons. You become practiced with light, medium, and heavy weapons and suffer no penalty when using any kind of weapon. Enabler.

Unmovable (3 Might points). You avoid being knocked down, pushed back, or moved against your will as long as you are upright and able to take actions. Enabler.

Tier 4: Living Wall (3 Might points). You specify a confined area—such as an open doorway, a hallway, or a space between two trees—where you stand. For the next ten minutes, if anyone attempts to enter or pass through that area and you don't wish it, you make an automatic attack against them. If you hit, not only do you inflict damage, but they must also stop their movement. Enabler.

Tier 5: Hardiness. You are trained in Might defense tasks. Enabler.

Mastery in Armor. The cost reduction from your Practiced in Armor ability improves. You now reduce the Speed Effort cost for wearing armor to 0. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Lethal Damage or Ignore Affliction as your tier 6 ability.

Lethal Damage. Choose one of your existing attacks that inflicts points of damage (depending on your type and focus, this might be a specific weapon, a special ability, or your unarmed attacks). When you hit with that attack, you inflict an additional 5 points of damage. Enabler.

Ignore Affliction (5 Might points). If you are affected by an unwanted condition or affliction (such as disease, paralysis, mind control, broken limb, and so on, but not damage), for one hour you can ignore it and act as if it doesn't affect you. If the condition would normally last less than an hour, it is entirely negated. Action.

If your character already is practiced in all weapons from your type, you should choose Like a Rock instead of Practiced With All Weapons as your tier 3 ability.

Armor, page 124

Most people don't wear armor, so the fact that you do probably separates you from the crowd, even if that armor takes the shape of a leather jacket or something similar.

Speed cost for wearing armor, page 124

MASTERS THE SWARM

Insects. Rats. Bats. Birds. Even creatures that have no true form to speak of, those built more of shade and fear than blood and bone. You master one type of small creature that obeys you. It's an unusual skill—as you've been told far too many times—but that's a price you're willing to pay for the power and pleasure of your connection to this hive mind of old.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. This person seems deathly afraid of your creatures and has a watchful eye on you.
2. Pick one other PC. Your creatures are attracted to this person for reasons you can't understand.
3. Pick one other PC. You are indebted to this character for an act of kindness in the past.
4. Pick one other PC. This character has an oddly shaped birthmark, mole, or other feature that reminds you of your creatures. Does it mean something?

GM Intrusions: Allies fear your creatures and attempt to attack them or flee from them. A command is misunderstood. Control is erratic or is lost. Bites and stings are not uncommon for masters of the swarm.

Tier 1: Influence Swarm (1 Intellect point). You master one type of small creature (such as insects, rats, birds, bats, or something less corporeal) and they respond to you in number. Your creatures within short range will not harm you or those you designate as allies for one hour. Action to initiate.

Tier 2: Control Swarm (2 Intellect points). Your swarm creatures from your Influence Swarm ability within short range do as you telepathically command for ten minutes. Even common insects (level 0) in large enough numbers can swarm about a single creature and hinder its tasks. Action to initiate.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Living Armor or Skill With Attacks as your tier 3 ability.

Living Armor (4 Intellect points). If you're in a location where it's possible for your creatures from Influence Swarm to come, you call a swarm around you for one

hour. They crawl over your body, fly around you in a cloud, or swim around you in a school. During this time, your Speed defense tasks are eased, and you gain +1 to Armor. Action to initiate.

Skill With Attacks. Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

Tier 4: Call Swarm (4 Intellect points). If you're in a location where it's possible for the creatures from your Influence Swarm ability to come, you call a swarm of them for one hour. During this hour, they do as you telepathically command as long as they are within long range. They can swarm about and hinder any or all opponents' tasks. While the creatures are in long range, you can speak to them telepathically and perceive through their senses. Action to initiate.

Tier 5: Gain Unusual Companion. You gain a special specimen as a constant companion. It is level 4 and no larger than the size of a small dog, and it follows your mental commands. You and the GM must work out the details of your creature, and you'll probably make rolls for it in combat or when it takes actions. The companion acts on your turn. If your companion dies, you can hunt in the wild for 1d6 days to find a new one. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Camouflage or Hive Mind as your tier 6 ability.

Camouflage (6 Intellect points). Your swarm works together to conceal you, blending you into your environment until you essentially become invisible for the next ten minutes. While you are invisible, this asset eases your stealth and Speed defense tasks by two steps. The swarm moves with you, concealing you until you reveal your presence or position by attacking, speaking, or otherwise taking action against another. If this occurs, you can regain the remaining





See, Coralee had prayed for justice, for retribution, for deliverance from this man, and—and the Good Mother had answered. Coralee stood silent and confined, rooted to her spot in the woods, as the Good Mother slowly raised her hands, and the ground around them twisted and crashed, spilling forth a swarm of what looked almost like rats, but huge and malformed, bones showing through hide that looked as though rotten flesh and poisonous vines had been woven together, teeth grown far larger and sharper than any rodent Coralee had ever seen, claws that looked more like the talons of giant owls.

—Season 2, Episode 21: A Worthy Grave

invisibility effect by taking an action to focus on hiding your position. Action to initiate or reinitiate.

Hive Mind (6 Intellect points). If you're in a location where it's possible for the creatures from your Influence Swarm ability to come, you call a swarm of them for ten minutes. During this time, they do as you command as long as they are within long range. They can swarm about and hinder any or all opponents' tasks, or they can focus the swarm and attack all opponents within immediate range of each other (all within long range of you). The attacking swarm inflicts 4 points of damage. You can also command the swarm to move heavy objects through collective effort, eat through wooden walls, and perform other actions suitable for a supernatural swarm. While the creatures are in long range, you can speak to them telepathically and perceive through their senses. Action to initiate.

MOVES LIKE A CATAMOUNT

You are extremely dexterous. Your speed and agility garner you awe, and maybe even a little fear. Your body is lithe, flexible, and graceful. Your training—and perhaps a touch of magic—allows you to move quickly and smoothly, land safely when you fall, and avoid danger.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. Their occasional clumsiness and loud behavior irritate you.
2. Pick one other PC. This character comes from the same place you do, and you knew each other as children.
3. Pick one other PC. You aid them with advice and a helping hand when they need

it. Anytime the two of you are next to each other, balancing, climbing, and jumping tasks are eased for them.

4. Pick one other PC. They owe you a significant amount of money.

GM Intrusions: Even a catamount can be clumsy sometimes, especially when overconfident. A well-calculated jump isn't quite as easy as it looks. An escape move is so overzealous that it sends the character right into harm's way

Tier 1: Reflexes. You gain 5 points to your Speed Pool. Enabler.

Balance. You are trained in balancing. Enabler.

Tier 2: Movement. You are trained in climbing and jumping. Enabler.

Safe Fall. You reduce the damage from a fall by 5 points. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Greater Reflexes or Improved Speed as your tier 3 ability. Whichever one you choose, you also get Hard to Pin Down.

Greater Reflexes. You gain +1 to your Speed Edge. Enabler.

Improved Speed. You gain 6 points to your Speed Pool. Enabler.

Hard to Pin Down. You are trained in all defense tasks. Enabler.

Tier 4: Quick Strike (4 Speed points). You make a melee attack with such speed that it's hard for your foe to defend against, and it knocks them off balance. Your attack is eased by two steps, and the foe, if struck, takes normal damage but is dazed so that their tasks are hindered for the next round. Action.

Tier 5: Slippery. You are trained in escaping any kind of bond or grasp. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Burst of Action or Deep Resources as your tier 6 ability.

Burst of Action (6 Speed points). You can take two separate actions this round. Enabler.

Deep Resources. You gain 6 points to your Speed Pool. Enabler.

POSSESSES THE GIFT

Truth be told, most people don't really have much magic to speak of. Sure, some have a smattering here and there, an intuition, an uncanny sense, a powerful ability to heal or speak or see the unseen. Then there are those few and far between who've got magic in their blood and bones. You're one of those rare creatures. Magic's stronger in you, clearer, powerful enough that others can probably sense it coming off you. Maybe that draws them to you, or maybe it makes them run away. Either way, you can ask magic to do your bidding and it obeys, enhancing your abilities and actions in unusual and interesting ways.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. You've placed an immutable, one-time ward that renders them immune to your abilities unless they want to be affected.

2. Pick one other PC. Due to some quirk of magic, you can occasionally (and accidentally) share your powers with them, which gives them an asset on any task they attempt using their abilities.

3. Pick one other PC. That character doesn't seem to trust or like you, but you feel compelled to win them over.

4. Pick one other PC. You've noticed that they have a book in their possession that you'd very much like to read, but you're unsure how to ask them about it.

GM Intrusions: Even if one tries to remain humble, skill and power might betray an arrogance that others find annoying or insulting. Powerful creatures and people take special notice of those who command the mysterious and strange.

Tier 1: Blessed. You gain 5 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

Tier 2: Gifted. You are trained in all of your supernatural character abilities. As a result, you ease any task involved in the use of one of these abilities. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Mind Ward or Sustained Abilities as your tier 3 ability.

Mind Ward. You are trained in Intellect defense tasks and have +2 Armor against Intellect damage (which normally ignores Armor). Enabler.

Sustained Abilities. Your supernatural abilities that have durations last twice as long. Your supernatural abilities that have short ranges reach to long range instead. Your supernatural abilities that inflict damage deal 1 additional point of damage. Enabler.

Tier 4: Greater Repertoire. You can learn one additional type or focus ability of fourth tier or lower. Enabler.

Tier 5: Beyond Gifted. You are specialized in all of your supernatural abilities. As a result, you ease any task involved in the use of one of these abilities by two steps. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Beyond Blessed or Sustained Abilities as your tier 6 ability.

Beyond Blessed. You gain 5 points to your Intellect Pool, and you gain +1 to your Intellect Edge. Enabler.

Sustained Abilities. If you already chose Sustained Abilities as your tier 3 option, your supernatural abilities that have durations now last three times as long, your supernatural abilities that have short ranges now reach to very long range instead, and your supernatural abilities that inflict damage now deal 2 additional points of damage. If you didn't take Sustained Abilities at tier 3, you gain the advantages noted there now. Enabler.

SERVES THE GREEN

Green keep you and hold you, daughter.

The Green fills you and calls to you. You are of the Green in a way that most people can't even begin to understand. It gives you kinship to the trees and beings, to the roots and blooms, to the mud and muck that nourishes and harbors. Even more so, it gives you purpose.

Perhaps you made a bargain to gain your abilities, or maybe the Green chose you for reasons you've yet to figure out. What you do know is that there is no power you'd rather serve or wield than that of the woods and wild things.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one or more other PCs. They came looking for help with a problem and found you. It's up to them whether they're satisfied with what they found or not.

2. Pick one other PC. This character believes you're some kind of legend based on a decade-old story about you that's grown in the telling. Sometimes that makes you confident. Other times, it's a lot to live up to.

3. Pick one other PC. They told you once that they worried your connection to the Green was endangering your physical or mental health. You don't know how they feel now.

4. Pick one other PC. Someone they loved was killed by a creature of the Green. When they discovered your connection, they didn't know how to react. They either feel anger toward you or hope you can help provide some answers; it's up to them.

GM Intrusions: The Green is of its own mind and does as it pleases. Sometimes the Green does not answer when called. Others deeply fear your connection to the Green or fear the Green itself.

Tier 1: Bloom of Power. Your connection to the Green grants you additional strength and power. You gain 3 points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

Wilderness Lore. You are trained in wilderness navigation and in identifying plants and creatures. Enabler.

Tier 2: Grasp of the Green (3+ Intellect points). Roots, branches, grass, mud, or other foliage in the area snags and holds

a foe you designate within short range for up to one minute. A foe caught in the grasp can't move from their position, and all physical tasks, attacks, and defenses are hindered, including attempts to free themselves. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to deal damage with the initial attack. Each level applied inflicts 2 additional points of damage when Grasp of the Green first snags and holds your foe.

You can also use this ability to clear an area of entangling growth in the immediate radius, such as an area of tall grass, thick brush, impenetrable vines, and so on. Action.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Hears the Green or Sanctuary as your tier 3 ability.

Hears the Green (4 Intellect points). You know how to listen to and connect with the Green in a way that makes you smarter, faster, or tougher, but when it wears off, the crash is a doozy, so you use it only in desperate situations. You gain 2 to your Might Edge, Speed Edge, or Intellect Edge for one minute, after which you can't gain the benefit again for one hour. During this follow-up hour, every time you spend points from a Pool, increase the cost by 1. Action.

Sanctuary (4 Intellect points). You call upon the Green and it reaches out to protect a creature or object that you choose in short range, surrounding them in foliage, stones, mud, or some other combination of elements that are available in the area. The sanctuary moves with the creature or object and lasts for ten minutes. If the target is a creature, they gain +1 to Armor; if the target is an object, attacks against it are hindered. Action.

Tier 4: The Green Is on Your Side (5 Intellect points). While you're in the wilderness, foes within short range are tripped by rocks, tangled in vines, bitten by insects, and distracted or confused by small animals, which hinders all their tasks for ten minutes. Action to initiate.

Tier 5: Intervention (2 Intellect points, or 2 Intellect points + 4 XP). You ask the Green to intervene on your behalf, usually against a creature within long range, changing the course of its life in a small way

The Green, page 188



Major effect, page 134

by introducing a **major effect** upon it (akin to what occurs when you roll a natural 20 on an attack). For example, a river overflows its banks, rocks fall, or a log bridge rots faster than normal.

If you want to try for a larger effect, and if the GM allows it, you can attempt an intervention with a more far-reaching effect, which is more like the kind of GM intrusion initiated by the GM on the players. In this case, Intervention also costs 4 XP, the effect might not work out exactly like you hope, and you can't make another plea for an intervention for a week. Action.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Beast Call or Companion of the Green as your tier 6 ability.

Beast Call (6 Intellect points). You ask the Green to manifest a horde of small animals or a single level 5 beast to help you temporarily. These creatures do your bidding for as long as you focus your attention, but you must use your action each turn to direct them. If you take an action other than directing them, the creatures disappear back to where they came from. Creatures must be manifested from foliage, soil, and other elements native to the area. Action.

Companion of the Green. You gain a creature of the Green as a constant companion. It is level 4 and probably the size of a small dog, and it follows your telepathic commands. You and the GM must work out the details of your creature, and you'll probably make rolls for it in combat or when it takes actions. The companion acts on your turn. If your companion dies, you can spend 1d6 days to call upon a new one. Enabler.

Companion of the Green isn't likely to give a PC Bartholomew (page 384), since he serves the Witch Queen (and is higher than level 4), but they could get a smaller, less powerful bear of the Green for their very own.

SHARES THE WAYS AND SIGNS

You've been around a long time, seen a lot of things, and know a lot about a lot—and it's one of your greatest pleasures in life to share all you know with those who might benefit. Although you're an easy learner, you're a better guide and teacher, taking those who express interest under your wing. Whether you're showing someone the best way to make plum jam, clean a rifle, split a load of cordwood, read the clouds and moon, know the best time to plant corn, read conjure cards, or something else, you're a true and called teacher, at your finest when you're sharing your knowledge.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. This character especially appreciates your knowledge and insight. You both gain +1 on any die rolls when you collaborate on the same task, fight the same foe, and so on.
2. Pick two other PCs. You have seen them, or someone who looked like them, make some terrible mistakes together before you became allies. You can choose whether or not to share that information. These characters can choose whether it was really them (it might not have been), and they may or may not share that information in return.
3. Pick one other PC. This character never seems to learn from you, and you both gain -1 on any die rolls when you collaborate on the same task, fight the same foe, and so on.
4. Pick one other PC. This character is so wrong about so many things that you feel obligated to try to help them better understand the world. Whether or not they are interested is up to them.



Ellie's gift came in fine, lacelike details. Connections had always revealed themselves to her since she was a girl. When she stilled her mind she could see the Green, reaching out in all its forms through rain and wind, flower and pollen, tree and root, and she could sense the places those connections had been broken or corrupted. She could smell the rot that rose up from beneath, trying to break those holy connective tissues that held the body of this world together—when she was with her sibling, their combined gifts were things to be feared. But the brightness and . . . loudness of her sister's presence could make the finer things hard to find.

—A Once-Told Tale: The Wolf Sisters Part Two



GM Intrusions: Sometimes NPCs take offense at being told what to do and only dig their heels in more fully. Students sometimes make beginner mistakes. Teaching others can distract you from the task at hand.

Tier 1: Understanding (2 Intellect points). You observe or study a creature, object, or location for at least one round. The next time you interact with it (possibly in the following round), a related task (such as persuading the creature, attacking it, or defending from its attack) is eased. Action.

Good Advice (1 Intellect point). You have experience in determining the best way to proceed. When you give another character a suggestion involving their next action, that task is eased. Action.

Tier 2: Shared Knowledge. Through examples, teaching, and conversation, you impart wisdom to your allies. After spending 24 hours with you, once per day each of your friends can ease a task. This benefit is ongoing while you remain in the friend's company. It ends if you leave, but it resumes

if you return to the friend's company within 24 hours. If you leave the friend's company for more than 24 hours, you must spend another 24 hours together to reactivate the benefit. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Applying Your Knowledge or Learned as your tier 3 ability.

Applying Your Knowledge. When you help another character undertake any action that you're untrained in, you are treated as if you are trained in it. Action.

Learned. The more you know, the more you learn. You gain 5 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

Tier 4: Inspire Action (4 Intellect points). If one ally can see and easily understand you, you can instruct them to take an action. If they take that exact action, they can do so as an additional action immediately. Doing so doesn't interfere with the ally taking a normal action on their turn. If you have the Speaker ability of the same name, when you use either ability, you can also move up to a



The beast tried to shake free, but her grip tightened as she spoke, her taunts becoming a working, a spell of a magnitude she'd never cast before. "You'd undo Sister Amy and Sister Zelda, teaching me to weave strong cloth, to speak true and believe no lies? You'd undo Grandma Karen and Auntie Jonna who taught me the songs and the stories of the old place, so I'd never forget where I came from? You'd undo the blood and the love my mothers shed and bled for me, after you had the very stones to take them from me in the first place? Oh beast, oh beast, I pity you—because in their names, in the names of Edith Nielsen Dooley and Mary Catherine Vivian Dooley, I bind you, I break you, and beast, I cast you OUT!"

—The Holiest Days of Bone and Shadow, Chapter Three:
Something Old, Something New

short distance as part of the same action (or grant your target the ability to do so). Action.

Tier 5: Show Them the Way (5+ Intellect points). You spend an hour instructing someone on how to perform a type ability that you know. The ability must be no higher than fourth tier, and the student must be able to understand your instructions. For one hour after you teach them, the student can perform that ability as if it were natural for them. They must pay the Might, Speed, or Intellect cost (if any) to use that ability. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase how long the student can use the ability or to teach additional students at the same time; each level of Effort used in this way increases the duration by one hour or the number of students by one. Action to initiate; one hour to complete.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Impart Understanding or Watch Me as your tier 6 ability.

Impart Understanding. Your Understanding ability works more effectively, allowing you to ease a task by two steps or to provide two assets to a friend's task when **helping**, instead of easing normally. Enabler.

Watch Me (6 Intellect points). Choose one of your stats (Might, Speed, or Intellect). When you succeed on a roll to perform a task related to that stat, and you applied at least one level of Effort, you can choose another character within short range. That character has an asset on the next task they attempt using that stat on their next turn. Enabler.

Most abilities in the Shoots Sharp and Straight focus affect any kind of gun you use, but some (like Damage Dealer) require you to choose one type of gun to use it with, such as "pistols" or "rifles."

Helping, page 150

You can't provide more than two assets when helping a friend, so there's no advantage to using Impart Understanding if you're already specialized in the task you're helping with.

SHOOTS SHARP AND STRAIGHT

You need only one weapon: a gun. Or maybe two guns. Without your gun at your side, you likely feel a little off-kilter, a little unprepared, or like you're not truly yourself. After all, a gun is so much more than the sum of its parts, at least in your hands. While most people can use guns, you *understand* guns. Your gun skills are such that you seem to do the impossible—make that faraway shot, do damage beyond the norm, and disarm others with a single bullet.

You might be a veteran who gained (or honed) your skills during the war, a hunter who provides for your family and community, or just someone who's always had a fascination with this particular weapon.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. You once overheard them say that guns are a dangerous weapon and no one should have one. It's up to you whether you want to prove them right or wrong.

2. Pick one other PC. That character's mother gave you the gun you now wield.

3. Pick one other PC. This person doesn't seem to understand how guns work and has a habit of getting in your way. If you miss your foe and accidentally hit someone else, it's likely to be them.

4. Pick one other PC. This character seems to revere you as some kind of legend based on a story about you that isn't entirely true. It's up to you whether you set them straight.

GM Intrusions: Misfire or jam! The attack fails and the action is lost, plus an additional action is needed to fix the problem.

Tier 1: Gunner. You inflict 1 additional point of damage with guns. Enabler.

Practiced With Guns. You are practiced with guns and suffer no penalty when using one. Enabler.

Tier 2: Careful Shot. You can spend points from either your Speed Pool or your Intellect Pool to apply levels of Effort to increase your gun damage. Each level of Effort adds 3 points of damage to a successful attack, and if you spend a turn lining up your shot, each level of Effort instead adds 5 points of damage to a successful attack. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Damage Dealer or Snipe as your tier 3 ability.

Damage Dealer. You inflict an additional 3 points of damage with one type of gun (such as “pistols” or “rifles”). Enabler.

Snipe (2 Speed points). If you spend one action aiming, in the next round you can make a precise ranged attack. You have an asset on this attack. If your attack is successful, it inflicts 4 additional points of damage. Action.

Tier 4: Snap Shot. You can make two gun attacks as a single action, but the second attack is hindered by two steps. Enabler.

Tier 5: Gun Mastery (6 Might or 6 Speed points). When using a gun, you can reroll any attack roll you wish and take the better of the two results. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Sharp Shooter or Special Shot.

Sharp Shooter (8+ Speed points). Your bullet strikes a foe in a vital spot. If the target is level 4 or lower, it is killed outright. For each level of Effort you apply, you can increase the level of the target by 1. Action.

Special Shot. When you hit a target with a gun attack, you can choose to reduce the damage by 1 point but hit the target in a precise spot. Some of the possible effects include (but are not limited to) the following:

- You can shoot an object (including a weapon) out of someone’s hand.
- You can shoot the leg, wing, or other limb they use to move, reducing their maximum movement speed to immediate for a few days or until they receive expert medical care.

- You can shoot a strap holding a backpack, armor, or a similarly strapped-on item so that it falls off. Enabler.

SPEAKS IN TONGUES

Something speaks through you. Angel or demon or God or the dead or something else (maybe many somethings?). Whatever they are, they give you a voice full of power and an insight into things you have no right to know. No matter whether you use your voice for good or ill, many people fear you, and perhaps rightfully so, for you might act as though you’re in control of these gifts, but you know full well that’s not always true.

When you’re speaking in tongues, your voice sounds nothing like your own and the words you speak aren’t always clear or in a language you know. In fact, you think it’s possible that everyone who hears your voice hears something unique to them.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. For reasons unknown to you, that character is completely immune to your abilities.
2. Pick one other PC. That person seems to be very wary of your abilities, and you’d like to put them more at ease around you.
3. Pick one other PC. Something about them seems to make your voice stronger. When they stand next to you, the first focus ability you use in any 24-hour period costs 2 fewer points.
4. Pick one other PC. You grew up together and were always close, but things seem to have cooled between you recently. You may or may not know why.

Additional Equipment: You have a piece of jewelry, a book, or a talisman of some sort that seems to allow the voices to flow through you more easily.

GM Intrusions: Allies react to you in fear. Your voice seems to be out of your control for a moment and does harm to someone near you. Your voice goes silent, rendering you unable to use your abilities.

Tier 1: Hears the Voices. Sometimes the voices whisper to you, telling you the secrets of others, giving you a sense of how they think, what they dream of, and what they fear. You’re trained in one of the following tasks: persuasion, deception, intimidation, or detecting falsehoods. Enabler.

A character who doesn’t use verbal speech can still speak in tongues. The voice that comes through the character isn’t related to their physical or mental ability or choice to speak.



It was Pastor Garvin who introduced the practice of speaking in tongues to the Elder Covenant's congregation, though it was a common one in these hills and most were familiar with it. The harsh, dissonant sounds that the Pastor wrenched from the throats of his flock grated against his eardrums and caused his stomach to churn with bile, yet he could not deny their power. Combined with a laying on of hands, perhaps anointed with oil or smeared with the blood of a calf or goat, they had the power to heal . . . or in some cases, to kill, though Cletus liked to think those times were a mercy, a quick death wrapped up in a frenzy of religion as opposed to a slow death from the black lung or the cancer. And if the ones that weren't saved had a tendency to come back . . . not quite unchanged . . . well, there was always a price to be paid.

—Season 1 Episode 3: The Covenant

Inside Voice (1+ Intellect points).

Using your voice, you can speak into the mind of someone you choose within short range. Communication is two-way, but the other party must be willing and able to communicate. You don't have to see the target, but you must know that they're within range. You can have more than one active contact at once, but you must establish contact with each target individually. Each contact lasts up to ten minutes. If you apply a level of Effort, the contact lasts for 24 hours. Action to establish contact.

Tier 2: Mind Reading (2 Intellect points).

Your voices tell you what others are thinking, allowing you to read the surface thoughts of a creature within short range, even if they don't want you to. You must be able to see your target. Once you have established contact, you can read the target's thoughts for up to one minute. If you also have the Mind Reading special ability from another source (such as your type), you can use this ability at long range, and you don't need to be able to see the target (but you do have to know that the target is within range). Action to initiate.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either As I Say or Power of the Voice as your tier 3 ability.

As I Say (4 Intellect points). Using your voice, you attempt to compel a creature to carry out your command as its next action. The creature must be within short range and

able to understand you. The command can't inflict direct harm on the creature or its allies, so "Attack yourself" won't work, but "Flee" might. In addition, the command can require the creature to take only one action, so "Unlock the door" might work, but "Unlock the door and run through it" won't. A commanded creature can still defend itself normally and return an attack if one is made on it. If you have another ability that allows you to command a creature, you can target two creatures at once as your base effect if you use either ability. Action.

Power of the Voice (3+ Intellect points).

Your voice reaches into the minds of up to three targets within short range (make an Intellect roll against each target). This burst inflicts 3 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). For each 2 additional Intellect points you spend, you can make an Intellect attack roll against an additional target. Action.

Tier 4: Hear Me Now (3 Intellect points).

Your voice uses lies, trickery, mockery, and perhaps even hateful, obscene language against a foe that can understand you. If successful, the foe is stunned for one round and can't act, and they are hindered the following round. Action.

Tier 5: Foul Aura (5+ Intellect points). Your words, gestures, and perhaps touch invest an object no larger than yourself with an aura of doom, fear, and doubt for one day. Creatures that can hear and understand you feel an urge to move at least a short distance



The voices rarely placed outright demands on the new pastor, well not precisely anyway. There were days he barely felt their touch on his mind at all. And others, he heard them more clearly, often not giving orders but making . . . suggestions. Improvements to certain turns of phrases in his sermons. Interpretations of Bible verses he might not have considered on his own and, truth to tell, Cletus's congregation certainly seemed to cleave to his new style of preaching, their eyes glowing with the fervor in the light of a gospel of fire and brimstone and blood.

—Season 1, Episode 3: The Covenant

away from the object. If a creature doesn't move away, all tasks, attacks, and defenses they attempt while within the aura are hindered. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to increase the duration; the aura lasts an additional day for each level of Effort applied. The aura is temporarily blocked while the object is covered or contained. Action to initiate.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Break Their Mind or I Command You as your tier 6 ability.

Break Their Mind (7+ Intellect points).

Using your clever words and knowledge of others, and given a couple of rounds of conversation to gain a few specific pieces of context regarding your target, you can utter a sentence designed to cause your target immediate psychological distress. If the target is within long range and can hear and understand you, they suffer 6 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) and forget the last day of their life, which might mean they forget you and how they came to be where they currently are. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to use Effort to attempt to break the mind of one additional target who can hear and understand you. Action to initiate; action to complete.

I Command You (6 Intellect points).

Everyone within long range who can hear and understand you takes no action for as long as you don't move and use your action to allow your voices to flow through you. If an affected creature is attacked during this time, they break out of the trance immediately. Action to initiate.

WALKS THESE WOODS

You're most at home in the woods and wilds of the world, taking respite in the ever-changing nature of the trees and creeks, in the hoots of owls and the branch-crackle of running creatures.

The ways of flora and fauna are your ways. Over the years, you've come to understand the mysteries of nature, weather, and survival, perhaps far more than you understand the mysteries of people. And over time, the flora and fauna come to understand you too, to see you not as a threat but as an ally, and perhaps eventually as one of their own.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC who doesn't appreciate (or perhaps even is wary of) the woods. You can't help but feel a little contempt for that character and their "civilized" ways, which show disdain for all things natural and (to your mind) true.
2. Pick one other PC. This character is one of the few people that you're completely comfortable around, and you're often surprised at how easily you let down your guard near them.
3. Pick one other PC. This character once saved you from an uncomfortable social situation, and you still feel grateful.
4. Pick one other PC. This person seems to understand civilization in the same way that you understand the wilderness. You could choose to help each other or despise each other for this different way of seeing the world.

Additional Equipment: You wear or carry something on your person—perhaps a necklace, walking stick, or carved animal—crafted from a tree that means something to you or someone you love.

GM Intrusions: People in cities and towns sometimes disparage those who still honor the woods. One can never truly know what else lurks behind the trees.

Tier 1: Wilderness Life. You are trained in two of the following: climbing, swimming, navigation, or identifying plants and creatures. Enabler.

Wild Hardiness. You gain 3 points to your Might Pool. Enabler.

Tier 2: Living Off the Land. Given an hour or so, you can always find edible food and potable water in the wilderness. You can even find enough for a small group of people, if need be. Further, since you're so hardy and have gained resistance over time, you

are trained in resisting the effects of natural poisons (such as those from plants or living creatures). You're also immune to natural diseases. Enabler.

Wilderness Explorer. While taking any action (including fighting) in the wild, you ignore any penalties due to natural causes such as tall grass, thick brush, rugged terrain, weather, and so on. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Animal Senses and Sensibilities or Wilderness Encouragement as your tier 3 ability.

Animal Senses and Sensibilities. You are trained in listening and spotting things. In addition, most of the time, the GM should alert you if you're about to walk into an ambush or a trap that is lower than level 5. Enabler.

Wilderness Encouragement (3 Intellect points). While in the wilderness, or when talking about your time in the wilderness, your stirring words of encouragement grant a target within short range that can understand you 1d6 points to one Pool. You can't use this ability on the same creature again until they've made a recovery roll. Action.

Tier 4: Animal Scrying (4+ Intellect points). If you know the general location of an animal that is friendly toward you and within 1 mile (1.5 km) of your location, you can sense through its senses for up to ten minutes. Action to establish.

Tier 5: The Wild Is on Your Side (5 Intellect points). While you're in the wilderness, foes within short range are tripped by rocks, tangled in vines, bitten by insects, and distracted or confused by small animals, which hinders all their tasks for ten minutes. Action to initiate.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either One With the Wild or Wild Camouflage as your tier 6 ability.

One With the Wild (6 Intellect points). For the next hour, natural animals and plants within long range will not knowingly harm you or those you designate. In addition, your Might Edge, Speed Edge, and Intellect Edge increase by 1, and if you make any recovery rolls during this period, you recover twice as many points. Action to initiate.



Wild Camouflage (4 Intellect points).

By drawing your clothing about you just so and using various tricks and your deep knowledge of your surroundings, you become invisible in the wilderness for ten minutes. While you are invisible, this asset eases your stealth and Speed defense tasks by two steps. This effect ends if you do something to reveal your presence or position—attacking, using an ability, moving a large object, and so on. If this occurs, you can regain the remaining invisibility effect by taking an action to focus on hiding your position. Action to initiate or reinstate.

WOULD RATHER BE READING

You know there's a whole big (and maybe scary) world out there, but there are whole big worlds inside your books too. More than most people will ever realize, or even care to. If you had your druthers, you'd spend every moment with your nose in a story, but you love your friends and family too—and so you venture out into the real world with them, using your knowledge to help them as best you can.

Connection: Choose one of the following.

1. Pick one other PC. They always ask you what you're reading—you decide if you find that wonderful or annoying.
2. Pick one other PC. You sense that they have little respect for book learning, and you wonder if you can find a way to change that (if it's even actually true).
3. Pick one other PC. They asked to borrow a book once and treated it so poorly that you're not sure if you can ever forgive them.
4. Pick one other PC. They seem to really respect your opinion, and sometimes when you give them advice or information, they can use it to ease a noncombat action.

Additional Equipment: A book, of course.

GM Intrusions: Books burn, get wet, or get lost. Information becomes outdated. Glasses break.

Tier 1: Knowledge Is Power. Choose two noncombat skills in which you are not trained. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

Tier 2: Book Smarts. You gain 6 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

Tier 3: Ability Choice. Choose either Applying Your Knowledge or Flex Skill as your tier 3 ability.

Applying Your Knowledge. When you help another character undertake any action that you're untrained in, you are treated as if you are trained in it. Action.

Flex Skill. At the beginning of each day, choose one task (other than attacks or defense) on which you will concentrate. For the rest of that day, you're trained in that task. You can't use this ability with a skill in which you're already trained to become specialized. Enabler.

Tier 4: Knowledge Is Power. Choose two noncombat skills in which you are not trained. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

Knowing the Unknown (6 Intellect points). By accessing the resources appropriate to your character, you can ask the GM one question and get a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. Gaining knowledge of the future is impossible. Action.

Tier 5: Greater Book Smarts. You gain 6 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

Tier 6: Ability Choice. Choose either Read the Signs or Tower of Intellect as your tier 6 ability. Whichever one you choose, you also get Knowledge Is Power.

Read the Signs (4 Intellect points). You examine an area and learn precise, useful details about the past (if any exist). You can ask the GM up to four questions about the immediate area; each requires its own roll. Action.

Tower of Intellect. You are trained in Intellect defense tasks. If you are already trained, you are specialized in those tasks instead. Enabler.

Knowledge Is Power. Choose two noncombat skills in which you are not trained. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

Chapter 7:

GOODS AND CURRENCY

Chapter 18: Cyphers, page 311
Chapter 19: Artifacts, page 330

Scrip has many nicknames, including clackers, dugaloos, and flickers. Scrip became illegal in the U.S. under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, but that may or may not be true in your modern alternate Appalachia. Either way, scrip is likely coveted by collectors and historians.

Layaway, where a seller reserves an item for you until you complete all the necessary payments, is a popular option for big-ticket items.

This chapter includes many options for protective clothing, weapons, day-to-day items, and so on, but it is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive. GMs should feel free to use the various tables, price lists, and examples as a jumping-off point to provide additional options for players.

Magical items such as cyphers and artifacts are covered in [chapters 18 and 19](#).

CURRENCY

There are three main types of currency that characters will have access to: money, company scrip, and barter.

Money is just as you'd expect it to be, with the reminder that most games will be set in the early 1900s and the value of the dollar was much different then. The tables in this chapter offer guidance on general price ranges for common objects during that time, with the understanding that costs will range from town to town and season to season.

Company scrip (commonly just called scrip) is a currency issued by companies (especially coal and logging companies) as an alternate way to pay their employees. Scrip is occasionally paper, but more often is made of copper, zinc, nickel, or other metal. It bears the name, logo, and other information about the issuing company and can only be

used in stores owned by the company that issued them (and the prices in these stores are often jacked up).

Barter is an exchange of goods, services, knowledge, and other useful offerings. You might barter with your neighbor by bringing them a pie in exchange for their healing skills, offer up a cypher in exchange for a much-needed machine part, or spend a day working on someone's farm in exchange for a meal. You might even get something now from someone in exchange for a future favor, or vice versa.

The barter value of goods isn't established by the wider marketplace, but by the people involved in the barter. The *perceived* value is very important, and there are many social implications. Slighting your neighbor, embarrassing someone with charity, or being seen as someone who can be taken advantage of are all concerns when bartering.

MATERIALS

In the early 1900s, the logging and coal mining boom brought railroads and commercial stores to the region—and with them, increased access to items and materials from outside the region. However, the majority of materials used for tools, weapons, buildings, and clothing are still made from scratch using resources from the region.

WOOD

Local wood, such as white pine, poplar, hickory, black willow, walnut, and buckeye, is used to make everything from houses, fences, and furniture to gun stocks, musical instruments, walking sticks, and cooking utensils.



METALS

Various metals are available locally, including iron, copper, and aluminum. Blacksmiths create all manner of hardware, including nails, hinges, cooking equipment, and farm tools, as well as horseshoes, wagon wheels, wrought iron fences, and candlesticks.

NON-METALLIC MINERALS

The region has an abundance of non-metallic mineral resources, such as marble, granite, slate, clay, silica sand, and quartz. Many of these are used for structures, roofs, and other building items. Glass made from silica sand is used to create windows, bottles, marbles, mason jars, and more, while clay is used for crocks, jugs, and dinnerware.

WHAT DOES MY CHARACTER WEAR?

Knowing what your character wears in a historical setting is always a little tricky, but here are some fashion guidelines to help get you started. The game is set primarily in the 1920s and 30s, during a time of fairly significant changes for clothing in style, function, and manufacture. Since we're dealing with these changes over two decades of time and a vast geographical area, the suggestions here are just that—suggestions. During that time, most fashion was gender-specific, so we've included options for men and women, but there's no reason you can't mix and match and make them your own.

There are a few types of clothing that are probably in every average person's closet: workwear, casual outfits, and clothes for more formal events (celebrations, church services, and ceremonies). These clothes are likely a mix of homemade items and mass-produced clothing from department stores or through mail-order catalogs such as Sears, Roebuck and Co.

Typically folks dress up when going to work, to visit a friend across town, to attend school, or to do the shopping. Essentially, anytime they leave the familiarity of their dwelling place, they put on a nice outfit. Not doing so is considered rude and inappropriate, unless you're visiting with family or your very best friend who lives nearby.

Breathable fabrics, such as cotton, rayon, and linen, are popular during the summer. Wool, chambray, corduroy, and flannel are popular winter fabrics. Materials like silk, satin, taffeta, velvet, and lace are used to make or accent formal wear.

For casual events, men wear collared shirts and trousers with a belt or suspenders. More

formal events call for suits. Men usually wear hats outside the home—fedoras and derbies for business, and boater hats and flat caps for leisure. Men are expected to remove their hats when indoors and to tip their hats to women and people of note.

Women wear dresses or skirts with blouses for both casual and formal events. Dress and skirt hemlines fall mid-shin to knee-length. Sleeveless blouses and dresses are popular. Knee or mid-thigh stockings made of silk, wool, or cotton are *de rigueur* outside of visiting a beach or doing tasks that would risk tearing them. Women's hats can seem more of a large hair adornment than a hat, with options like the cloche, faille, and decorated turban. Women don't have to remove their hats indoors and aren't expected to tip their hats to anyone.

Clothing for children and young adults reflects the sensibilities and style of adult fashion of the time. Like their parents, they wear a mix of homemade, hand-me-down, and store-bought clothing. Hats are typically worn only during formal functions. Babies are often clothed simply in gowns and wear cloth diapers covered with wool or rubber shells to stanch leakage.

Typical workwear for someone doing manual labor, such as a coal miner, railroad worker, or farmer, is thick cotton or dungaree pants or overalls, a cotton button-up shirt, and a jacket or coat; the emphasis is on protection from the elements and the environment. Just like today, people with specific jobs, such as police officers, wear uniforms. And those who belong to a cultural or religious group with specific clothing obligations dress within the norms of their group.

For additional resources and inspiration, you can find the entirety of old mail-order catalogs, such as Sears, Roebuck and Co., online.

An unskilled laborer makes about \$20 per week. A skilled laborer makes double that.

FABRIC

While commercially available fabric is becoming more widespread, wool is still the more common material for coverlets, tablecloths, rugs, and clothing. Spinning and weaving are important skills and a vital source of social interaction.

PLANTS

Local plants such as oak slits and honeysuckle vines are woven into baskets, mats, and other useful items. Dyes are made from local and farmed plants like beets, purple cabbage, walnut hulls, pokeberries, marigolds, willow bark, and rhododendrons. Many plants are also used for healing, creating cyphers and other magical items, and, of course, cooking.

EQUIPMENT AND PRICES

The goods presented in this chapter are general examples, not exhaustive lists. Use them as a guideline to get you started; if the characters want to buy something that isn't here (but that seems plausible to find in the region during the time period), use a similar item and take your best guess.

While everything listed has an approximate dollar amount, they are also broken into five general price categories. These categories are mostly for the GM, who can use them to adjust prices (based on rarity, for example, or the increased cost of something from a company store), quickly figure out the price for an item that isn't currently included, and get a general sense of how valuable something is for bartering purposes.

Another advantage of using ranges is that you can move your game forward or backward in time, and the general price ranges still apply. An item listed as inexpensive in the early 1900s is likely to remain inexpensive in modern day. Of course, there are exceptions, as some items increase or decrease in availability, popularity, materials, and so on.

If you're not sure where to categorize something, a good guide is that \$1 in 1920 was equal to about \$15 when this book was written (2022). Which means that \$10 is worth around \$150. Spending \$100 in the 1920s is the equivalent to spending around \$1,500 today.

If you're unsure of the cost of something, you can use the real world as your guide. Resources like old Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalogs (and, in later years, The Whole Earth catalogs) are available free online. Doing a quick search for land prices, wages, and travel costs in Appalachia in the 1900s will give you tons of useful information. And, of course, if your game is set in modern day, you already know how much most things cost, and it's easy enough to look up anything you're not sure about.

WHAT'S IN YOUR BAG?

Many small items that you can hold in your hands—like cigarettes, a cup of coffee, a candy bar, and so on—cost less than a dollar. Often sometimes much less. If your character needs a small item that costs less than a dollar, they can probably afford to purchase it or already have it in their bag (provided that it makes narrative sense that they were able to buy, trade, steal, or otherwise get ahold of the item). This includes (but isn't limited to):

- Bottle of pain reliever
- Can opener
- Cigarettes or pipe
- Cup or tin of coffee
- Box of matches
- Eating utensils
- Game items (deck of cards, dice)
- Movie ticket
- Postage stamps
- Snacks (chocolate bar, pop)
- Staples (loaf of bread, gallon of milk, dozen eggs, pound of butter)
- Toys (doll, marbles, stuffed animal)

Characters will want to keep track of how much money and scrip they have, as well as any outstanding barter they may have made. It's probably not worth counting things in terms of cents, since that can make tracking hard. If someone wants to buy stuff that's under a dollar, consider having them buy a bunch of things at once.

Inexpensive items are things that people buy regularly. They typically cost a couple of dollars or less. A simple lantern, pocket knife, hatchet, most ammunition, and accessories like gloves or a cap would all fit into this category. Room and board for a night also falls into this category.

Moderate items are things that people buy, but not too often and not in great quantities. These items typically cost between 5 and 10 dollars. A miner's tent, portable camp stove, hunting coat, dress, and .22-caliber rifle are all moderate items.

An **expensive item** is something that would strain a common person's finances. They typically cost between 20 and 50 dollars. A bike, pony cart, double-barrel shotgun, commercial sheepskin-lined coat, wool suit, and nice watch would be in this category.

A **very expensive item** is probably out of the reach of most people except in very special circumstances. These are usually at least \$100. A good saddle horse, a radio, a refrigerator, a washing machine, and a couple of acres of land are examples of very expensive items.

An **exorbitant item** is something only the very rich can afford, and costs at least \$500. A one-carat diamond ring, a car, a barn, and a house are all in this category.

EQUIPMENT NOTES

Book: Provides an asset to any roll made concerning the subject of the book as long as the character has the book in their possession, can read it, and can devote half an hour to the task (or twice as long as normal, whichever is greater).

Travel pack: Contains 50 feet (15 m) of rope, rations for three days, three spikes, hammer, water-resistant clothes, sturdy shoes, and a flashlight.



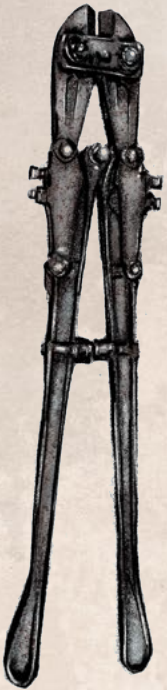
Miner's Hat



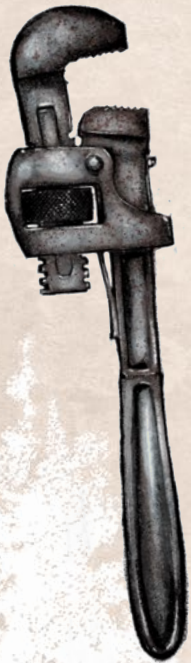
Camera



Traveling Bag



Bolt Cutters



Pipe Wrench

GOODS AND SERVICES

INEXPENSIVE (\$3 OR LESS)

Item	Price	Notes
Accessories, simple	\$3	Handbag, scarf, gloves, cap, and so on
Baking set	\$2	Includes bread pans, pie plates, cake pans, measure, flour sifter, rolling pin
Bedroll	\$3	
Book	\$1	See notes
Bottles, glass	\$1	
Cast iron pan, kettle, griddle, or Dutch oven	\$2-5	
Copper-plated tea kettle or coffeepot	\$1	
Compass	\$1	
Clothing, simple	\$3	Trousers, shirt, swimsuit, vest, and so on
Diner meal	\$1	
Fishing outfit	\$3	Includes rod and reel, line, sinkers, tackle
Flashlight	\$1	
Haircut, men's	\$3	
Hammock	\$3	
Journal and pencil	\$1	
Lantern	\$3	Includes oil can
Lodging, basic	\$1-2	Per night
Lodging, basic	\$3-5	Per week
Medical items, simple	\$1	Hot water bottle, bandages, and so on
Miner's carbide lamp or lantern	\$4	Burns 4 hours with one charge of carbide
Carbide refill (10 cans)	\$1	
Ouija board	\$1	
Rope	\$1	50 feet
Rope ladder	\$2	25 feet
Shaving set	\$1	
Shovel, grain scoop, or spade	\$1	
Small animal trap	\$2	
Vacuum bottle or thermos	\$1	Keeps liquids hot for 24 hours or cool for three days

MODERATE (\$5-10)

Item	Price	Notes
Bag of heavy tools	\$10	Contains a selection of tools useful for carpentry and other items
Boots	\$5	Rubber or leather
Camp stove, portable	\$6	
Clothing, fancy	\$5	
Dictionary or encyclopedia	\$7	
Doctor's bag	\$10	Leather
Groceries	\$5	A week's worth for a couple of people
Haircut, women's	\$5	
Hospital care	\$5	Basic daily rate, per day
Lodging, high end	\$5	Per night
Miner's tent	\$5	Up to two people
Travel pack	\$5	See notes
Wagon, kid's	\$5	
Wheelbarrow	\$5	



*Miner's
Rucksack*

EXPENSIVE (\$20-50)

Item	Price	Notes
Bicycle	\$20	
Camera	\$20	
Flat-bottomed boat	\$30	
Moonshine	\$25	1 gallon
Overcoat	\$30	Wool; commercially made
Pony cart	\$30	2-seater, ponies not included
Saddle	\$20	
Suit	\$30	Wool; commercially made
Watch	\$20	

VERY EXPENSIVE (\$100 OR MORE)

Item	Price	Notes
Land	\$100	Couple of acres
Refrigerator	\$150	
Horse	\$200	
Piano	\$150	
Radio	\$200	
Washing machine	\$100	
Wedding	~\$400	

EXORBITANT (\$500 OR MORE)

Item	Price	Notes
Barn	\$1,500	Commercial, includes pre-cut materials but not labor
Car	\$2,000	
House	\$3,000	Commercial, includes pre-cut materials but not labor

Buying a commercial barn or house often means ordering the pre-cut materials from a catalog like Sears, Roebuck and Co. and then building it yourself.



Oil Slicker

Some character abilities from your type or focus may allow you to become practiced with other kinds of armor.

Some characters have abilities that reduce or even negate the costs of wearing armor.

Type, page 24

While “bulletproof” armor existed by the late 1800s, most of it wasn’t very good, and it was quite rare. Characters who wish to wear this type of armor likely paid to have it custom made or made it themselves. It’s likely to be a combination of metal, wool, and leather.

ARMOR

Characters expecting danger frequently wear protective clothing. Even the simplest protective covering helps against stabs and cuts, and more sophisticated or heavier armor protects against graver threats. Armor is divided into three categories—light, medium, and heavy. Light armor gives the wearer 1 point of Armor, medium gives 2 points of Armor, and heavy gives 3 points of Armor.

You can wear only one kind of protective clothing at a time—you can’t wear a leather jacket and a sheepskin-lined coat together, for example. However, Armor bonuses from multiple sources combine to provide a total Armor rating. For example, if you have an ability that gives you +1 to Armor, an artifact that offers another +1 to Armor, and a leather coat that grants +2 to Armor, you have a total of 4 Armor.

USING ARMOR

Anyone can wear any type of armor, but it can be taxing. Wearing armor increases the cost of using a level of Effort when attempting a Speed-based action, according to the following table.

ARMOR COST

Armor	Additional Speed Effort Cost Per Level
Light	+1
Medium	+2
Heavy	+3



Light armor gives the wearer 1 point of Armor, medium gives 2 points of Armor, and heavy gives 3 points of Armor.

So if you’re wearing light armor and want to use two levels of Effort on a Speed-based roll to run across rocky ground, it costs 7 points from your Speed Pool rather than 5 (3 for the first level of Effort, plus 2 for the second level of Effort, plus 1 per level for wearing light armor). Edge reduces the overall Speed cost as normal.

Having experience with a category of armor is called being *practiced* with the armor. Your type tells you whether or not you are practiced with light, medium, or heavy armor.

ARMOR

Item	Price Category	Notes
Leather jacket	Inexpensive	Light armor
Hunting coat	Inexpensive	Light armor; canvas
Oil slicker	Inexpensive	Light armor; rain protection
Overall jacket	Moderate	Medium armor
Sheepskin-lined coat	Moderate	Medium armor
Makeshift metal-plated armor	Expensive	Heavy armor
Reinforced jacket	Expensive	Heavy armor
Steel breastplate	Expensive	Heavy armor
Simple ballistic armor	Expensive	Heavy armor

WEAPONS

Weapons are divided into three categories—light, medium, and heavy. Not all characters are familiar with all categories of weapons. Protectors know their way around most types, but Explorers prefer light or medium weapons, and Sages and Speakers usually stick to light weapons.

Having experience with a weapon is called being *practiced* with the weapon. Your type tells you whether or not you are practiced with light, medium, or heavy weapons. If you wield a weapon that you have no experience with, an attack with that weapon is hindered.

Light weapons inflict only 2 points of damage, but attacks with them are eased because they are fast and easy to use. Examples of light weapons are punches, kicks, baseball bats, knives, hand axes, darts, very small pistols, and whips. Weapons that are particularly small or lightweight are light weapons.

Medium weapons inflict 4 points of damage. Medium weapons include hunting knives, bows, typical handguns, light rifles, sawed-off shotguns, pickaxes, and wrecking bars. Most weapons are medium. Anything that could be used in one hand (even if it's often used in two hands, such as a pickaxe) is probably a medium weapon.

Heavy weapons inflict 6 points of damage, and you must use two hands to attack with them. Heavy weapons include massive axes, heavy crossbows, rifles, and regular shotguns. Most things that must be used in two hands are heavy weapons.

Weapon	Damage
Light	2 points (attack eased)
Medium	4 points
Heavy	6 points



Paring Knife

EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS

Bombs and other explosive devices operate differently than other weapons. Instead of making an attack against a single target, they affect all targets within an area (usually an immediate area) and inflict damage on all of them. A separate attack roll is required for each target (or a Speed defense roll if the PCs are the targets of such an attack), although to simplify, the player can make one attack roll and compare it to the difficulty of attacking each target. Usually, even if the attack roll fails (or the Speed defense roll succeeds), the targets still suffer a smaller amount of damage, often 1 point. Explosives like grenades can be thrown a short distance. Otherwise, a launcher weapon is needed to project them a long distance (or farther).

Some explosives create smoke, poison gas, flame, or other effects.



Colt Revolver



Sledgehammer

Many things found around the home or farm can be used as inexpensive weapons, including pipe wrenches, bolt cutters, sledgehammers, hedge shears, bread knives, and hoof parers.

Speed defense, page 24

In this setting, most shields are not something that you buy at the store, or even have specially made. Instead, they're likely something you pick up in the moment, such as a piece of wood or metal, a large pan, or something else that's at hand.

Miner's Pick



Hoof Parer



WEAPONS AND SHIELDS

INEXPENSIVE

Item	Price	Notes
All ammo, including bullets, arrows, and crossbow bolts	\$1	20 count
Crowbar or wrecking bar	\$1	Light weapon
Hoof parer	\$2	Light weapon
Pen or pocket knife	\$1	Light weapon
Sheep shears	\$1	Light weapon
Whip	\$2	Light weapon
Shield, simple	—	Provides an asset to Speed defense rolls

MODERATE

Item	Price	Notes
Axe	\$5	Light weapon
Blowgun	\$5	Light weapon; short range
Dagger	\$5	Light weapon
Hand grenade	\$7	Explosive weapon; inflicts 4 points of damage in immediate radius
Hatchet	\$5	Medium weapon
High-powered spray gun and compressed air sprayer	\$10	Medium weapon; short range (up to 25 feet, or 7.5 m)
Hunting knife	\$7	Light weapon
Machete or scythe	\$10	Medium weapon
Throwing knife	\$5	Light weapon; can be thrown a short distance

EXPENSIVE

Item	Price	Notes
Bow	\$15	Medium weapon; long range
Light crossbow	\$10	Medium weapon; long range
Light handgun	\$10	Medium weapon; long range
Rifle	\$25	Medium weapon; long range
Shotgun	\$25	Medium weapon; short range
Sledgehammer	\$15	Heavy weapon

VERY EXPENSIVE

Item	Price	Notes
Heavy handgun	\$30	Heavy weapon; long range
Heavy rifle	\$30	Heavy weapon; 300-foot (90 m) range

Part 3: PLAYING THE GAME



Chapter 8: Rules of the Game	128
Chapter 9: Experience Points	162

Chapter 8: RULES OF THE GAME

The Hounds, page 364

This game is played in the joint imagination of all the players, including the GM. The GM sets the scene, the players state what their characters attempt to do, and the GM determines what happens next. The rules and the dice help make the game run smoothly, but it's the people, not the rules or the dice, that direct the action and determine the story—and the fun. If a rule gets in the way or detracts from the game, the players and the GM should work together to change it.

This is how you play:

The player tells the GM what they want to do. This is a character action.

The GM determines if that action is routine (and therefore works without needing a roll) or if there's a chance of failure.

*Might, page 16
Speed, page 16
Intellect, page 16*

If there is a chance of failure, the GM determines which stat the task uses (**Might**, **Speed**, or **Intellect**) and the task's difficulty—how hard it will be on a scale from 1 (really easy) to 10 (basically impossible).

*Training, page 129
Equipment, page 120
Special abilities, page 21*

The player and the GM determine if anything about the character—such as **training**, **equipment**, **special abilities**, or various actions—can modify the difficulty up or down by one or more steps. If these modifications reduce the difficulty to less than 1, the action is routine (and therefore works with no roll needed).

Task Difficulty table, page 130

If the action still isn't routine, the GM uses its difficulty to determine the target number—how high the player must roll to succeed at the action (see the **Task Difficulty table**). The GM doesn't have to tell the player what the target number is, but they can give the player a hint, especially if the character would reasonably know if the action was easy, average, difficult, or impossible.

The player rolls a d20. If they roll equal to or higher than the target number, the character succeeds.

That's it. That's how to do anything, whether it's identifying an unknown symbol, calming a rampaging bear, finding your way through a mine, or battling **the Hounds**. Even if you ignored all the other rules, you could still play the game with just this information. The key features here are: character actions, determining task difficulty, and determining modifications.

TAKING ACTION

Each character gets one turn each round. On a character's turn, they can do one thing—an action. All actions fall into one of three categories: **Might**, **Speed**, or **Intellect** (just like the three stats). Many actions require die rolls—rolling a d20.

Every action performs a task, and every task has a difficulty that determines what number a character must reach or surpass with a die roll to succeed.

Most tasks have a difficulty of 0, which means the character succeeds automatically. For example, walking across a room, opening a door, or putting an apple pie in the oven are all actions, but none of them requires a roll. Actions that are usually difficult or that become difficult due to the situation (such as shooting at a creature in the dark) have a higher difficulty. These actions usually require a roll.

Some actions require a minimum expenditure of **Might**, **Speed**, or **Intellect** points. If a character cannot spend the minimum number of points needed to complete the action, they automatically fail at the task.

KEY CONCEPTS

Action: Anything a character does that is significant—punch a foe, leap a chasm, activate a device, use a special power, and so on. Each character can take one action in a round.

Character: Any creature in the game capable of acting, whether it is a player character (PC) run by a player or a creature or nonplayer character (NPC) run by the game master (GM).

Difficulty: A measure of how easy it is to accomplish a task. Difficulty is rated on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). Altering the difficulty to make a task harder is called “hindering.” Altering it to make a task easier is called “easing.” All changes in difficulty are measured in steps. Difficulty often equates directly with level, so opening a level 3 locked door probably has a difficulty of 3.

Ease: A decrease in a task’s difficulty, usually by one step. If something doesn’t say how many steps it eases a task, then it reduces the difficulty by one step.

Effort: Spending points from a stat Pool to reduce the difficulty of a task. A PC decides whether or not to apply Effort on their turn before the roll is made. NPCs never apply Effort.

Hinder: An increase in a task’s difficulty, usually by one step. If something doesn’t say how many steps it hinders a task, then it increases the difficulty by one step.

Inability: The opposite of trained—you’re hindered whenever you attempt a task that you have an inability in. If you also become trained in the task, the training and the inability cancel each other out and you become practiced.

Level: A way to measure the strength, difficulty, power, or challenge of something in the game. Everything in the game has a level. NPCs, creatures, and objects have levels that determine the difficulty of any task related to them. For example, an opponent’s level determines how hard they are to hit or avoid in combat. A door’s level indicates how hard it is to break down. A lock’s level determines how hard it is to pick. Levels are rated on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). PC tiers are a little like levels, but they go only from 1 to 6 and mechanically work very differently than levels—for example, a PC’s tier does not determine a task’s difficulty.

Practiced: The normal, unmodified ability to use a skill—not trained, specialized, or an inability. Your type determines what weapon and armor skills you’re practiced in; if you aren’t practiced with a type of weapon, you have an inability in it.

Roll: A d20 roll made by a PC to determine whether an action is successful. Although the game occasionally uses other dice, when the text simply refers to “a roll,” it always means a d20 roll.

Round: A length of time about five to ten seconds long. There are about ten rounds in a minute. When it’s really important to track precise time, use rounds. Basically, it’s the length of time to take an action in the game, but since everyone more or less acts simultaneously, all characters get to take an action each round.

Specialized: Having an exceptional amount of skill in a task. Being specialized eases the task by two steps. If you are specialized in mining, all your mining tasks are eased by two steps.

Stat: One of the three defining characteristics for PCs: Might, Speed, or Intellect. Each stat has two values: Pool and Edge. Your Pool represents your raw, innate ability, and your Edge represents knowing how to use what you have. Each stat Pool can increase or decrease over the course of play—for example, you can lose points from your Might Pool when struck by an opponent, spend points from your Intellect Pool to activate a special ability, or rest to recover points in your Speed Pool after a long day of hiking. Anything that damages a stat, restores a stat, or boosts or penalizes a stat affects the stat’s Pool.

Task: Any action that a PC attempts. The GM determines the difficulty of the task. In general, a task is something that you do and an action is you performing that task, but in most cases they mean the same thing.

Trained: Having a reasonable amount of skill in a task. Being trained eases the task. For example, if you are trained in mining, all mining tasks are eased for you. If you become very skilled at that task, you become specialized instead of trained. You do not need to be trained to attempt a task.

Turn: The part of the round when a character or creature takes its actions. For example, if an Explorer and a Sage are fighting a wampus, each round the Explorer takes an action on their turn, the Sage takes an action on their turn, and the wampus takes an action on its turn. Some abilities or effects last only one turn, or end when the next turn is started.



Wampus, page 379

DETERMINING TASK STAT

Every task relates to one of a character's three stats: Might, Speed, or Intellect. Physical activities that require strength, power, or endurance relate to Might. Physical activities that require agility, flexibility, or fast reflexes relate to Speed. Mental activities that require force of will, memory, or mental power relate to Intellect. This means you can generalize tasks into three categories: Might tasks, Speed tasks, and Intellect tasks. You can also generalize rolls into three categories: Might rolls, Speed rolls, and Intellect rolls.

The category of the task or roll determines what kind of Effort you can apply to the roll and may determine how a character's other abilities affect the roll. For example, a Sage may have an ability that makes them better at Intellect rolls, and a Protector may have an ability that makes them better at Speed rolls.

DETERMINING TASK DIFFICULTY

The most frequent thing a GM does during the game—and probably the most important thing—is set a task's difficulty. To make the job easier, use the Task Difficulty table, which associates a difficulty rating with a descriptive name, a target number, and general guidance about the difficulty.

Every difficulty from 1 to 10 has a target number associated with it. The target

number is easy to remember: it's always three times the difficulty. The target number is the minimum number a player needs to roll on a d20 to succeed at the task.

Moving up or down on the table is called *hindering* or *easing*, which is measured in steps.

For example, reducing a difficulty 5 task to a difficulty 4 task is "easing the difficulty by one step" or just "easing the difficulty" or "easing the task." Most modifiers affect the difficulty rather than the player's roll. This has two consequences:

- Low target numbers such as 3 or 6, which would be boring in most games that use a d20, are not boring in the Cypher System. For example, if you need to roll a 6 or higher, you still have a 25% chance to fail.
- The upper levels of difficulty (7, 8, 9, and 10) are all but impossible because the target numbers are 21 or higher, which you can't roll on a d20. However, it's common for PCs to have abilities or equipment that ease a task and thus lower the target number to something they *can* roll on a d20.

A character's tier does not determine a task's level. Things don't get more difficult just because a character's tier increases—the world doesn't instantly become a more difficult place. Fourth-tier characters don't deal only with level 4 creatures or difficulty 4 tasks (although a fourth-tier character probably has a better shot at success than

TASK DIFFICULTY TABLE

Task Difficulty	Description	Target No.	Guidance
0	Routine	0	Anyone can do this basically every time.
1	Simple	3	Most people can do this most of the time.
2	Standard	6	Typical task requiring focus, but most people can usually do this.
3	Demanding	9	Requires full attention; most people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
4	Difficult	12	Trained people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
5	Challenging	15	Even trained people often fail.
6	Intimidating	18	Normal people almost never succeed.
7	Formidable	21	Impossible without skills or great effort.
8	Heroic	24	A task worthy of tales told for years afterward.
9	Immortal	27	A task worthy of legends that last lifetimes.
10	Impossible	30	A task that normal humans couldn't consider (but one that doesn't break the laws of physics).

MODIFYING THE DIFFICULTY

a first-tier character does). Just because something is level 4 doesn't necessarily mean it's meant only for fourth-tier characters. Similarly, depending on the situation, a fifth-tier character could find a difficulty 2 task just as challenging as a second-tier character does.

Therefore, when setting the difficulty of a task, the GM should rate the task on its own merits, not on the power of the characters.

The important thing to remember is that a skill can reduce the difficulty by no more than two steps, and assets can reduce the difficulty by no more than two steps, regardless of the situation. Thus, no task's difficulty will ever be reduced by more than four steps without using Effort.

By using skills, assets, and Effort, you can ease a task by a maximum of ten steps.

After the GM sets the difficulty for a task, the player can try to modify it for their character. Any such modification applies only to this particular attempt at the task. In other words, picking a particular lock might be difficulty 6, but since the character doing the work is skilled in lockpicking, has the right tools, and has another character assisting them, the difficulty in this instance might be much lower. That's why it's important for the GM to set a task's difficulty without taking the character into account. The character comes in at this step.

By using skills and assets, using abilities, working together, and—perhaps most important—applying Effort, a character can ease a task by multiple steps to make it easier. Rather than adding bonuses to the player's roll, reducing the difficulty lowers the target number. If they can reduce the difficulty of a task to 0, no roll is needed; success is automatic. (An exception is if the

Unless for some reason you tell the players directly, they'll never know if you change an NPC's stats or a task's difficulty on the fly. If you do it to make a better story, that's your purview.



GM intrusion, page 162

GM decides to use a **GM intrusion** on the task, in which case the player would have to make a roll at the original difficulty.)

There are three basic ways in which a character can ease a task: skills, assets, and Effort. Each method eases the task by at least one step—never in smaller increments.

SKILLS

Characters may be skilled at performing a specific task. A skill can vary from character to character. For example, one character might be skilled at lying, another might be skilled at trickery, and a third might be skilled in all interpersonal interactions. The first level of being skilled is called being trained, and it eases that task by one step. More rarely, a character can be incredibly skilled at performing a task. This is called being specialized, and it eases the task by two steps instead of one. Skills can never ease a task by more than two steps—any more than two steps from being trained and specialized don't count.

ASSETS

An asset is anything that helps a character with a task, such as having a really good crowbar when trying to force open a door or being in a rainstorm when trying to put out a fire. Appropriate assets vary from task to task. The perfect awl might help when woodworking, but it won't make it easier to ride a horse. An asset usually eases a task by one step. Assets can never ease a task by more than two steps—any more than two steps from assets don't count.

EFFORT

A player can apply Effort to ease a task. To do this, the player spends points from the stat Pool that's most appropriate to the task. For example, applying Effort to dig out a collapsed mining shaft requires a player to spend points from the character's Might Pool; applying Effort to decipher a code in someone's diary requires them to spend points from the character's Intellect Pool.

For every level of Effort spent on a task, the task is eased. It costs 3 points from a stat Pool to apply one level of Effort, and it costs 2 additional points for every level thereafter (so it costs 5 points for two levels of Effort, 7 points for three levels of Effort,

and so on). A character must spend points from the same stat Pool as the type of task or roll—Might points for a Might roll, Speed points for a Speed roll, or Intellect points for an Intellect roll.

Every character has a maximum level of Effort they can apply to a single task. Effort can never ease a task by more than six steps—any more than six steps from applying Effort don't count.

Free Level of Effort: A few abilities give you a free level of Effort (these usually require you to apply at least one level of Effort to a task). In effect, you're getting one more level of Effort than what you paid for. This free level of Effort can exceed the Effort limit for your character, but not the six-step limit for easing a task.

ROLLING THE DIE

To determine success or failure, a player rolls a die (always a d20). If they roll the target number or higher, they succeed. Most of the time, that's the end of it—nothing else needs to be done. Very rarely, a character might apply a small modifier to the roll. For example, if they have a +2 bonus when attempting a specific action, they add 2 to the number rolled. However, the original roll matters if it's a special roll.

This distinction is important when stacking skills and assets to ease an action, especially since reducing the difficulty to 0 or lower means no roll is needed.

THE PLAYER ALWAYS ROLLS

In this game, players always drive the action. That means they make all the die rolls. If a PC throws themselves off a moving horse-drawn cart, the player rolls to see if they succeed without getting hurt, scaring the horses, and so on. If a PC searches for a hidden door, the player rolls to determine whether they find it. If part of a mine collapses, the PC rolls to try to get out of the way without being hit. If a PC and an NPC arm wrestle, the player rolls, and the NPC's level determines the target number. If a PC attacks a foe, the player rolls to see if they hit. If a foe attacks the PC, the player rolls to see if they dodge the blow.

As shown by the last two examples, the PC rolls whether they are attacking or defending. Thus, something that improves defenses might ease or hinder their rolls depending on whether the PC is defending or attacking. For example, if a PC uses a low wall to gain cover from attacks, the wall eases the player's defense rolls. If a foe uses the wall to gain cover from the PC's attacks, it hinders the player's attack rolls.

SPECIAL ROLLS

If a character rolls a natural 1, 17, 18, 19, or 20 (meaning the d20 shows that number), special rules come into play. These are explained in more detail in the following sections.

- 1: GM Intrusion.** The GM makes a free intrusion (see below) and doesn't award experience points (XP) for it.
- 17: Damage Bonus.** If the roll was a damage-dealing attack, it deals 1 additional point of damage.
- 18: Damage Bonus.** If the roll was a damage-dealing attack, it deals 2 additional points of damage.
- 19: Minor Effect.** If the roll was a damage-dealing attack, it deals 3 additional points of damage or the PC gets a minor effect in addition to the normal results of the task. If the roll was something other than an attack, the PC gets a minor effect in addition to the normal results of the task.
- 20: Major Effect.** If the roll was a damage-dealing attack, it deals 4 additional points of damage or the PC gets a major or minor effect in addition to the normal results of the task. If the roll was something other than an attack, the PC gets a major effect in addition to the normal results of the task. If the PC spent points from a stat Pool on the action, the point cost for the action decreases to 0, meaning the character regains those points as if they had not spent them at all.

GM INTRUSION

GM intrusion is explained in more detail in chapter 17, but essentially it means that something occurs to complicate the character's life. The character hasn't necessarily fumbled or done anything wrong (although perhaps they did). It could just be that the task presents an unexpected difficulty or something unrelated affects the current situation.

For GM intrusion on a defense roll, a roll of 1 might mean that the PC takes 2 additional points of damage from the attack, indicating that the opponent got in a lucky blow.

MINOR EFFECT

A minor effect happens when a player rolls a natural 19. Most of the time, a minor effect is slightly beneficial to the PC, but not overwhelming. A climber gets up the steep slope a bit faster. A repaired weapon works a bit better. A character jumping down into a pit lands on their feet. Either the GM or the player can come up with a possible minor effect that fits the situation, but both must agree on what it should be.

Don't waste a lot of time thinking of a minor effect if nothing appropriate suggests itself. Sometimes, in cases where only success or failure matters, it's okay to have no minor effect. Keep the game moving at an exciting pace.

In combat, the easiest and most straightforward minor effect is dealing 3 additional points of damage with an attack. The following are other common minor effects for combat:

Damage object: Instead of striking the foe, the attack strikes what the foe is holding. If the attack hits, the character makes a Might roll with a difficulty equal to the object's level. On a success, the object moves one or more steps down the **object damage track**.

Distract: For one round, all of the foe's tasks are **hindered**.

Knock back: The foe is knocked or forced back a few feet. Most of the time, this doesn't matter much, but if the fight takes place on a ledge or next to a rushing river, the effect can be significant.

For complete details on GM intrusion and how to use it to best effect in the game, see page 270.

Object damage track, page 146

Hindered, page 129

Prone, page 144

Dazed and Stunned, page 143

A blinded creature's attacks automatically miss unless the creature can use another sense (such as hearing) to get an idea of where their opponent might be, in which case the attack is hindered by four steps.

Minor and major effects are a great way for players to spice up a combat encounter with an unexpected twist. A creative player uses them to gain a short-term advantage and to make the fight more exciting and cinematic.

Move past: The character can move a short distance at the end of the attack. This effect is useful to get past someone guarding a door, for example.

Strike a specific body part: The attacker strikes a specific spot on the defender's body. The GM rules what special effect, if any, results. For example, hitting a creature's tentacle limb that is wrapped around an ally might make it easier for the ally to escape. Hitting a foe in the eye might **blind** it for one round. Hitting a creature in its one vulnerable spot might ignore Armor.

Usually, the GM just has the desired minor effect occur. For example, rolling a 19 against a relatively weak foe means it's knocked off the cliff. The effect makes the round more exciting, but the defeat of a minor creature has no significant impact on the story. Other times, the GM might rule that an additional roll is needed to achieve the effect—the special roll only gives the PC the *opportunity* for a minor effect. This mostly happens when the desired effect is very unlikely, such as pushing a 1,000-pound (450 kg) moose off a cliff.

If the player just wants to deal 3 additional points of damage as the minor effect, no extra roll is needed.

MAJOR EFFECT

A major effect happens when a player rolls a natural 20. Most of the time, a major effect is quite beneficial to the character. A climber gets up the steep slope in half the time. A jumper lands with such panache that those nearby are impressed and possibly intimidated. A defender makes a free attack on a foe.

Either the GM or the player can come up with a possible major effect that fits the situation, but both must agree on what it should be. As with minor effects, don't spend a lot of time agonizing over the details of a major effect. In cases where only success or failure matters, a major effect might offer the character a one-time asset (a modification of one step) to use the next time they attempt a similar action. When nothing else seems appropriate, the GM can simply grant the PC an additional action on their turn that same round.

In combat, the easiest and most straightforward major effect is dealing 4

additional points of damage with an attack. The following are other common major effects for combat.

Disarm: The foe drops an object that it is holding.

Impair: For the rest of the combat, all tasks the foe attempts are hindered.

Knock down: The foe is knocked **prone**. It can get up on its turn.

Stun: The foe loses its next action.

As with minor effects, usually the GM just has the desired major effect occur, but sometimes they might require an extra roll if the major effect is unusual or unlikely.

OPTIONAL RULE: CHOOSING A COMBAT EFFECT AHEAD OF TIME

While normally you get a minor or major effect based on your die roll, sometimes a character in combat tries to achieve a minor or major effect as a part of a deliberate strategy, such as disarming a foe they don't want to harm or shooting a huge beast in the eye to blind it so they can run away. A character can choose a minor or major combat effect ahead of time so they can achieve it without rolling a natural 19 or 20 on the die, but the attack is modified in these ways:

- **For a minor effect**, you subtract 4 from your damage, and the attack is hindered.
- **For a major effect**, you subtract 8 from your damage, and the attack is hindered by two steps.

In either case, if your attack would deal 0 points of damage or less, there is no damage or effect at all.

RETRYING A TASK AFTER FAILURE

If a character fails a task (whether it's climbing a wall, picking a lock, trying to find a hidden passage, or something else) they can attempt it again, but they must apply at least one level of Effort when retrying that task. A retry is a new action, not part of the same action that failed, and it takes the same amount of time as the first attempt did.

Sometimes the GM might rule that retries are impossible. Perhaps a character has one chance to convince the leader of a group of thugs not to attack, and after that, no amount of talking will stop them.

This rule doesn't apply to something like attacking a foe in combat because combat is always changing and fluid. Each round's situation is new, not a repeat of a previous situation, so a missed attack can't be retried.

INITIAL COST

The GM can assign a point cost to a task just for trying it. Called an initial cost, it's simply an indication that the task is particularly taxing. For example, let's say a character wants to try a Might action to open a heavy cellar door that is partially rusted shut. The GM says that forcing the door open is a difficulty 5 task, and there's an initial cost of 3 Might points simply to try. This initial cost is in addition to any points the character chooses to spend on the roll (such as when applying Effort), and the initial cost points do not affect the difficulty of the task. In other words, the character must spend 3 Might points to attempt the task at all, but that doesn't help them open the door. If they want to apply Effort to ease the task, they have to spend more points from their Might Pool.

Edge helps with the initial cost of a task, just as it does with any expenditure from a character's Pool. In the previous example, if the character had a Might Edge of 2, they would have to spend only 1 point (3 points minus 2 from their Might Edge) for the initial cost to attempt the task. If they also applied a level of Effort to open the door, they couldn't use their Edge again—Edge applies only once per action—so using the Effort would cost the full 3 points. Thus, they'd spend a total of 4 points (1 for the initial cost plus 3 for the Effort) from their Might Pool.

The rationale of the initial cost rule is that, while things like Effort can help a character succeed on an action, logic still suggests that some actions are very difficult and taxing, particularly for some PCs more than others.

DISTANCE

Distance is simplified into four basic categories: immediate, short, long, and very long.

Immediate distance from a character is within reach or within a few steps; if a character stands in a small room, everything in the room is within immediate distance. At most, immediate distance is 10 feet (3 m). Immediate distance is sometimes referred to as close, or even point-blank, particularly when referring to ranges.

Short distance is anything greater than immediate distance but less than 50 feet (15 m) or so.

Long distance is anything greater than short distance but less than 100 feet (30 m) or so.

Very long distance is anything greater than long distance but less than 500 feet (150 m) or so.

Beyond that range, distances are always specified—1,000 feet (300 m), 1 mile (1.5 km), and so on.

All weapons and special abilities use these terms for ranges. For example, all melee weapons have immediate range—they are close-combat weapons, and you can use them to attack anyone within immediate distance. A thrown knife (and most other thrown weapons) has short range. A rifle has long range.

A character can move an immediate distance as part of another action. In other words, they can take a few steps to tend a fire. They can lunge across a small room to attack a foe. They can open a door and step through.

A character can move a short distance as their entire action for a turn. They can also try to move a long distance as their entire action; this is a Speed task with a difficulty of 4, and failure means that the character stops at some point, slipping or stumbling or otherwise getting held up.

GMs and players don't need to determine exact distances. For example, if the PCs are fighting a *stalk of shucks*, any character can

The words "immediate" and "close" can be used interchangeably to talk about distance. If a creature or object is within arm's reach of the character, it can be considered both immediate and close.

Shucks, page 373

likely attack any foe in the general melee—they're all within immediate range. However, if one shuck stays back to be a lookout, a character might have to use their entire action to move the short distance required to attack that foe. It doesn't matter if the shuck is 20 feet (6 m) or 40 feet (12 m) away—it's simply considered short distance. It does matter if the shuck is more than 50 feet (15 m) away because that distance would require a long move.

TIMEKEEPING

Generally, keep time the same way that you normally would, using minutes, hours, days, and weeks. Thus, if the characters walk overland for 15 miles (24 km), about eight hours pass, even though the journey can be described in only a few seconds at the game table. Precision timekeeping is rarely important. Most of the time, saying things like "That takes about an hour" works fine.

This is true even when a special ability has a specific duration. In an encounter,

a duration of "one minute" is mostly the same as saying "the rest of the encounter." You don't have to track each round that ticks by if you don't want to. Likewise, an ability that lasts for ten minutes can safely be considered the length of an in-depth conversation, the time it takes to quickly explore a small area, or the time it takes to rest after a strenuous activity.

ENCOUNTERS, ROUNDS, AND INITIATIVE

Sometimes in the course of the game, the GM or players will refer to an "encounter." Encounters are not so much measurements of time as they are events or instances in which something happens, like a scene of a movie or a chapter in a book. An encounter might be a fight with a foe, a dramatic crossing of a raging river, or a stressful negotiation with an important official. It's useful to use the word when referring to a specific scene, as in "My Might Pool is low after that encounter with the **wolf sisters** earlier."



Wolf sisters, page 386

TIMEKEEPING

Action	Time Usually Required
Walking a mile over easy terrain	About fifteen minutes
Walking a mile over rough terrain (forest, desert, hills)	About half an hour
Walking a mile over difficult terrain (mountains, thick jungle)	About forty-five minutes
Boating a mile through clear water	A couple of minutes
Walking from one significant location in a city to another	About fifteen minutes
Observing a new location to get salient details	About fifteen minutes
Having an in-depth discussion	About ten minutes
Resting after a fight or other strenuous activity	About ten minutes
Resting and having a quick meal	About half an hour
Making or breaking camp	About half an hour
Shopping for supplies in a market or store	About an hour
Meeting with an important contact	About half an hour
Referencing a book	About half an hour
Searching a room for hidden things	At least half an hour, perhaps one hour
Searching for cyphers or other valuables amid a lot of stuff	About an hour
Identifying and understanding a cypher	Fifteen minutes to half an hour
Identifying and understanding an artifact	At least fifteen minutes, perhaps three hours
Repairing a device (assuming parts and tools available)	At least an hour, perhaps a day
Building a device (assuming parts and tools available)	At least a day, perhaps a week

A round is about five to ten seconds. The length of time is variable because sometimes one round might be a bit longer than another. You don't need to measure time more precisely than that. You can estimate that on average there are about ten rounds in a minute. In a round, everyone—each character and NPC—gets to take one action.

To determine who goes first, second, and so on in a round, each player makes a Speed roll called an **initiative** roll. Most of the time, it's only important to know which characters act before the NPCs and which act after the NPCs. On an initiative roll, a character who rolls higher than an NPC's target number takes their action before the NPC does. As with all target numbers, an NPC's target number for an initiative roll is three times the NPC's level. Many times, the GM will have all NPCs take their actions at the same time, using the highest target number from among all the NPCs. Using this method, any characters who rolled higher than the target number act first, then all the NPCs act, and finally any characters who rolled lower than the target number act.

The order in which the characters act usually isn't important. If the players want to go in a precise order, they can act in initiative order (highest to lowest), by going around the table, by going oldest to youngest, and so on.

For example, Steve, Cameron, and Tammie's characters are in combat with two level 2 shucks.

The GM has the players make Speed rolls to determine initiative. Steve rolls an 8, Cameron rolls a 15, and Tammie rolls a 4. The target number for a level 2 NPC is 6, so each round Steve and Cameron act before the shucks, then the shucks act, and finally Tammie acts. It doesn't matter whether Steve acts before or after Cameron, as long as they think it's fair.

After everyone—all PCs and NPCs—in the combat has had a turn, the round ends and a new round begins. In all rounds after the first, everyone acts in the same order as they did in the first round. The characters cycle through this order until the logical end of the encounter (the end of the fight or the completion of the event) or until the GM asks them to make new initiative rolls. The GM can call for new initiative rolls

at the beginning of any new round when conditions drastically change. For example, if the NPCs gain reinforcements, the environment changes (perhaps a storm rolls in), the terrain changes (maybe part of the roof collapses above the PCs), or something similar occurs, the GM can call for new initiative rolls.

Since the action moves as a cycle, anything that lasts for a round ends where it started in the cycle. If a PC uses an ability on an opponent that hinders its defenses for one round, the effect lasts until the PC acts on their next turn.

An initiative roll is a d20 roll. Since your initiative depends on how fast you are, if you spend Effort on the roll, the points come from your Speed Pool.

Initiative, page 136



Faster Initiative (Optional Rule): To make an encounter move faster, if at least one character rolls high enough to beat the target number of the NPC(s), all the characters act before the NPC(s). If nobody rolls high enough to beat that target number, all the characters act after the NPC(s). On the characters' turn, go clockwise around the table. If you're playing using an online video chat or virtual table, start with the leftmost player on the GM's screen and move right; repeat.

ACTIONS

Anything that your character does in a round is an action. It's easiest to think of an action as a single thing that you can do in five to ten seconds. For example, if you use your crossbow to shoot a creature, that's one action. So is running for cover behind a stack of barrels, prying open a stuck door, using a rope to pull your friend up from a pit, or activating a cypher (even if it's stored in your pack).

Opening a door and attacking a creature on the other side are two actions. It's more a matter of focus than time. Drawing your blade and attacking a foe is all one action. Putting away your bow and pushing a heavy table to block a door are two actions because each requires a different train of thought.

If the action you want to accomplish is not within reach, you can move a little bit. Essentially, you can move up to an immediate distance to perform your action. For example, you can move an immediate distance and attack a foe, open a door and move an immediate distance into the hallway beyond, or grab your hurt friend lying on the ground and pull them back a few steps. This movement can occur before or after your action, so you can move to a door and open it, or you can open a door and move through it.

The most common actions are:

- Attack
- Activate a special ability (one that isn't an attack)
- Move
- Wait
- Defend
- Do something else

A CLOSER LOOK AT SITUATIONS THAT DON'T INVOLVE PCs

Ultimately, the GM is the arbiter of conflicts that do not involve the PCs. They should be adjudicated in the most interesting, logical, and story-based way possible. When in doubt, match the level of the NPCs (characters or creatures) or their respective effects to determine the results. Thus, if a level 4 NPC fights a level 3 NPC, the level 4 NPC will win, but if they face a level 7 NPC, they'll lose. Likewise, a level 4 creature resists poisons or devices of level 3 or lower but not those of level 5 and above.

The essence is this: it doesn't matter if something is a creature, a poison, or a spirit-repelling artifact. If it's a higher level, it wins; if it's a lower level, it loses. If two things of equal level oppose each other, there might be a long, drawn-out battle that could go either way.

ACTION: ATTACK

An attack is anything that you do to someone that they don't want you to do. Slashing a foe with a curved dagger is an attack, harming a foe with a **moon shard** artifact is an attack, and wrapping a foe in thick rope is an attack. An attack almost always requires a roll to see if you hit or otherwise affect your target.

In the simplest kind of attack, such as a PC trying to stab an attacker with a knife, the player rolls and compares their result to the opponent's target number. If their roll is equal to or greater than the target number, the attack hits. Just as with any kind of task, the GM might modify the difficulty based on the situation, and the player might have a bonus to the roll or might try to ease the task using skills, assets, or Effort.

A less straightforward attack might be a special ability, such as **Shake the Bones**, which damages a foe with spoken words. However, it's handled the same way: the player makes a roll against the opponent's target number. Similarly, an attempt to tackle a foe and wrestle it to the ground is still just a roll against the foe's target number.

Moon shard, page 339

Shake the Bones, page 54

Attacks are sometimes categorized as “melee” attacks, meaning that you hurt or affect something within immediate reach, or “ranged” attacks, meaning that you hurt or affect something at a distance.

Melee attacks can be Might or Speed actions—player choice. Physical ranged attacks (such as bows, thrown weapons, and guns) are almost always Speed actions, but those that come from special abilities tend to be Intellect actions.

Special abilities that require touching the target require a melee attack. If the attack misses, the power is not wasted, and you can try again each round as your action until you hit the target, use another ability, or take a different action that requires you to use your hands. These attempts in later rounds count as different actions, so you don’t have to keep track of how much Effort you used when you activated the ability or how you used Edge. For example, let’s say that in the first round of combat, you activate a special ability that requires you to touch your foe and you use Effort to ease the attack, but you roll poorly and miss your foe. In the second round of combat, you can try attacking again and use Effort to ease the attack roll.

The GM and players are encouraged to describe every attack with flavor and flair. One attack roll might be a stab to the foe’s limb. A miss might be the PC’s sword slamming into the wall. Combatants lunge, block, duck, spin, leap, and make all kinds of movements that should keep combat visually interesting and compelling. **Part 5: Running the Game** has much more guidance in this regard.

Common elements that affect the difficulty of a combat task are cover, range, and darkness. The rules for these and other modifiers are explained in the **Attack Modifiers and Special Situations** section of this chapter.

DAMAGE

When an attack strikes a character, it usually means the character takes damage.

An attack against a PC subtracts points from one of the character’s stat Pools—usually the Might Pool. Whenever an attack simply says it deals “damage” without specifying the type, it means Might damage, which is by far the most common type. Intellect damage, which is usually the result

of a mental attack, is always labeled as Intellect damage. Speed damage is often a physical attack, but attacks that deal Speed damage are fairly rare.

NPCs don’t have stat Pools. Instead, they have a characteristic called health. When an NPC takes damage of any kind, the amount is subtracted from its health. Unless described otherwise, an NPC’s health is always equal to its target number. Some NPCs might have special reactions to or defenses against attacks that would normally deal Speed damage or Intellect damage, but unless the NPC’s description specifically explains this, assume that all damage is subtracted from the NPC’s health.

Objects don’t have stat Pools or health. They have an **object damage track**, just like how PCs have a damage track. **Attacking objects** might move them down their damage track.

Damage is always a specific amount determined by the attack. For example, a slash with a machete or a stab with a stake deals 4 points of damage. A Speaker’s Shake the Bones ability deals 4 points of damage. Often, there are ways for the attacker to increase the damage. For example, a PC can apply Effort to deal 3 additional points of damage, and rolling a natural 17 on the attack roll deals 1 additional point of damage.

ARMOR

Pieces of equipment and special abilities protect a character from damage by giving them Armor. Each time a character takes damage, subtract their Armor value from the damage before reducing their stat Pool or health. For example, if a Protector with 2 Armor is hit by an arrow that deals 4 points of damage, they take only 2 points of damage (4 minus 2 from their Armor). If Armor reduces the incoming damage to 0 or lower, the character takes no damage from the attack. For example, the Protector’s 2 Armor protects them from all physical attacks that deal 1 or 2 points of damage.

The most common way to get Armor is to wear physical armor, made from materials like leather and metal. All physical armor comes in one of three categories: light, medium, or heavy. Light armor gives the wearer 1 point of Armor, medium gives 2 points of Armor, and heavy gives 3 points of Armor.

Even if you mainly use a melee weapon, it’s a good idea to have a ranged weapon as a backup, just in case you have to attack something that’s out of your immediate reach. A cypher or even something you can throw will do in a pinch.

*Object damage track, page 146
Attacking objects, page 146*

*Part 5: Running the Game,
page 263*

*Attack Modifiers and Special
Situations, page 143*

For more information on types and categories of physical armor, see page 124.

When you see the word “Armor” capitalized in the game rules (other than in the name of a special ability), it refers to your Armor characteristic—the number you subtract from incoming damage. When you see the word “armor” in lowercase, it refers to any physical armor you might wear.

Other effects can add to a character’s Armor. If a character is wearing a sheepskin-lined coat (+2 to Armor) and has an ability that provides additional protection and grants +1 to Armor, their total is 3 Armor. If they also use a cypher that hardens their flesh temporarily for +1 to Armor, their total is 4 Armor.

Some types of damage ignore physical armor. Attacks that specifically deal Speed damage or Intellect damage ignore Armor; the creature takes the listed amount of damage without any reduction from Armor. Ambient damage (see below) usually ignores Armor as well.

A creature may have a special bonus to Armor against certain kinds of attacks. For example, a protective suit made of a sturdy, fire-resistant material might normally give its wearer +1 to Armor but count as +3 to Armor against fire attacks. An artifact worn as a helmet might grant +2 to Armor only against mental attacks.

AMBIENT DAMAGE

Some kinds of damage aren’t direct attacks against a creature, but they indirectly affect everything in the area. Most of these are environmental effects such as high temperatures, deep sea pressure, or background radiation. Damage from these kinds of sources is called ambient damage. Physical armor usually doesn’t protect against ambient damage, though a specially crafted suit of armor can protect against hot weather.

DAMAGE FROM HAZARDS

Attacks aren’t the only way to inflict damage on a character. Experiences such as falling from a great height, being burned in a fire, and spending time in severe weather also deal damage. Although no list of potential hazards could be comprehensive, the Damage From Hazards table includes common examples.

THE EFFECTS OF TAKING DAMAGE

When an NPC reaches 0 health, they are either dead or (if the attacker wishes) incapacitated, meaning unconscious or beaten into submission.

As previously mentioned, damage from most sources is applied to a character’s Might Pool. Otherwise, stat damage always reduces the Pool of the stat it affects.

DAMAGE FROM HAZARDS

Source	Damage	Notes
Falling	1 point per 10 feet (3 m) fallen (ambient damage)	—
Minor fire	3 points per round (ambient damage)	—
Major fire	6 points per round (ambient damage)	Engulfed in flames; lava
Acid splash	2 points per round (ambient damage)	—
Acid bath	6 points per round (ambient damage)	Immersed in acid
Heat	1 point per round (ambient damage)	—
Severe heat	3 points per round (ambient damage)	Midday desert without shade or water
Shock	1 point per round (ambient damage)	Often involves losing next action
Electrocution	6 points per round (ambient damage)	Often involves losing next action
Crush	3 points	Object or creature falls on character
Huge crush	6 points	Roof collapse; cave-in
Collision	6 points	Large, fast object strikes character

If damage reduces a character's stat Pool to 0, any further damage to that stat (including excess damage from the attack that reduced the stat to 0) is applied to another stat Pool.

Damage is applied to Pools in this order:

1. Might (unless the Pool is 0)
2. Speed (unless the Pool is 0)
3. Intellect

Even if the damage is applied to another stat Pool, it still counts as its original type for the purpose of Armor and special abilities that affect damage. For example, if a character with 2 Armor is reduced to 0 Might and then is hit by a creature's claw for 3 points of damage, it still counts as Might damage, so their Armor reduces the damage to 1 point, which then is applied to their Speed Pool. In other words, even though they take the damage from their Speed Pool, it doesn't ignore Armor like Speed damage normally would.

In addition to taking damage from their Might Pool, Speed Pool, or Intellect Pool, PCs also have a damage track. The damage track has four states (from best to worst): hale, impaired, debilitated, and dead. When one of a PC's stat Pools reaches 0, they move one step down the damage track. Thus, if they are hale, they become impaired. If they are already impaired, they become debilitated. If they are already debilitated, they become dead.

Some effects can immediately shift a PC one or more steps on the damage track. These include rare poisons, disease, and massive traumas (such as falls from very great heights, being run over by a speeding vehicle, and so on, as determined by the GM). Some attacks, like Sage's **Blood Ward** or a Speaker's **Bewitch**, have effects other than or in addition to damage to a stat Pool or shifting the PC on the damage track. These attacks can cause unconsciousness, paralysis, and so on.

THE DAMAGE TRACK

As noted above, the damage track has four states: hale, impaired, debilitated, and dead.

Hale is the normal state for a character: all three stat Pools are at 1 or higher, and the PC has no penalties from harmful conditions. When a hale PC takes enough damage to reduce one of their stat Pools to 0, they become impaired. Note that a character whose stat Pools are much lower than normal can still be hale.

Impaired is a wounded or injured state. When an impaired character applies Effort, it costs 1 extra point per level applied. For example, applying one level of Effort costs 4 points instead of 3, and applying two levels of Effort costs 7 points instead of 5.

An impaired character ignores minor and major effect results on their rolls, and they don't deal as much extra damage in combat with a special roll. In combat, an impaired character's roll of 17 or higher deals only 1 additional point of damage. When an impaired PC takes enough damage to reduce one of their stat Pools to 0, they become debilitated.

Debilitated is a critically injured state. A debilitated character may not take any actions other than to move (probably crawl) no more than an immediate distance. If a debilitated character's Speed Pool is 0, they can't move at all. When a debilitated PC takes enough damage to reduce a stat Pool to 0, they are dead.

Dead is dead. **Usually.**

The damage track allows you to know how far from death you are. If you're hale, you're three steps from death. If you're impaired, you're two steps from death. If you're debilitated, you are only one small step from death's door.



When NPCs (who have only health) suffer Speed or Intellect damage, normally this is treated the same as Might damage. However, the GM or the player has the option to suggest an appropriate alternate effect—the NPC suffers a penalty, moves more slowly, is stunned, and so on.

Healing an NPC or creature restores health instead of Might, Speed, or Intellect.

*Blood Ward, page 37
Bewitch, page 53*

Am I dead? Characters can be brought back from the dead, but this is incredibly rare, requires a great deal of power, and always has a cost.

RECOVERING POINTS IN A POOL

After losing or spending points in a Pool, you recover those points by resting. You can't increase a Pool past its maximum by resting—just back to its normal level. Any extra points gained above your maximum go away with no effect. The amount of points you recover from a rest, and how long each rest takes, depends on how many times you have rested so far that day.

When you rest, make a recovery roll. To do this, roll a d6 and add your tier. You recover that many points, and you can divide them among your stat Pools however you wish. For example, if your recovery roll is 4 and you've lost 4 points of Might and 2 points of Speed, you can recover 4 points of Might, or 2 points of Might and 2 points of Speed, or any other combination adding up to 4 points.

The first time you rest each day, it takes only a few seconds to catch your breath. If you rest this way in the middle of an encounter, it takes one action on your turn.

The second time you rest each day, you must rest for ten minutes to make a recovery roll.

The third time you rest each day, you must rest for one hour to make a recovery roll.

The fourth time you rest each day, you must rest for ten hours to make a recovery roll (usually, this occurs when you stop for the day to eat and sleep).

After that much rest, it's assumed to be a new day, so the next time you rest, it takes only a few seconds. The next rest takes ten minutes, then one hour, and so on, in a cycle.

If you haven't rested yet that day and you take a lot of damage in a fight, you could rest a few seconds (regaining 1d6 points + 1 point per tier) and then immediately rest for ten minutes (regaining another 1d6 points + 1 point per tier). Thus, in one full day of doing nothing but resting, you could recover 4d6 points + 4 points per tier.

Each character chooses when to make recovery rolls. If a party of five PCs rests for ten minutes because two of them want to make recovery rolls, the other three characters don't have to make rolls at that time. Later in the day, those three can decide to rest for ten minutes and make recovery rolls.

Recovery Roll	Rest Time Needed
First recovery roll	One action
Second recovery roll	Ten minutes
Third recovery roll	One hour
Fourth recovery roll	Ten hours

Many character abilities enhance recovery rolls, as do some cyphers and artifacts.

Your character sheet has a box you can check off for each of your recovery rolls. When you start a new day, erase your marks in those boxes so you can start fresh.



RESTORING THE DAMAGE TRACK

Using points from a recovery roll to raise a stat Pool from 0 to 1 or higher also automatically moves the character up one step on the damage track.

If all of a PC's stat Pools are above 0 and the character has taken special damage that moved them down the damage track, they can use a recovery roll to move up one step on the damage track instead of recovering points. For example, a character who is debilitated from a hit with a poisoned weapon can rest and move up to impaired rather than recover points in a Pool.

SPECIAL DAMAGE

In the course of playing the game, characters face all manner of threats and dangers that can harm them in a variety of ways, only some of which are easily represented by points of damage.

Dazed and Stunned: Characters can be dazed when struck hard on the head, exposed to extremely loud sounds, or affected by a mental attack. When this happens, for the duration of the daze effect (usually one round), all of the character's tasks are hindered. Similar but more severe attacks can stun characters. Stunned characters lose their turn (but can still defend against attacks normally).

Poison and Disease: When characters encounter poison—whether the venom of a serpent, crafted poison dissolved in a drink, or the poisoned tip of a blade—they make a Might defense roll to resist it. Failure to resist can result in points of damage, moving down the damage track, or a specific effect such as paralysis, unconsciousness, disability, or something stranger. For example, some poisons affect the brain, making it impossible to say certain words, take certain actions, resist certain effects, or recover points in a stat Pool.

Diseases work like poisons, but their effect occurs every day, so the victim must make a Might defense roll each day or suffer the effects. Disease effects are as varied as poisons: points of damage, moving down the damage track, disability, and so on. Many diseases inflict damage that cannot be restored through conventional means.

Paralysis: Paralytic effects cause a character to drop to the ground, unable to move. Unless otherwise specified, the character can still take actions that require no physical movement.

Other Effects: Other special effects can render a character blind or deaf, unable to stand without falling over, or unable to breathe. Stranger effects might negate gravity for the character, transport them to another place, make them immaterial, implant false memories or senses, alter the way their brain processes information, or inflame their nerves so they are in constant, excruciating pain. Each special effect must be handled on a case-by-case basis. The GM adjudicates how the character is affected and how the condition can be alleviated (if possible).

NPCs AND SPECIAL DAMAGE

The GM always has final say over what special damage will affect an NPC. While most NPCs react like characters, nonhuman creatures might react very differently. For example, a tiny bit of venom is unlikely to hurt a giant creature, and it won't affect a spirit or haint at all.

If an NPC is susceptible to an attack that would shift a character down the damage track, using that attack on the NPC usually renders it unconscious or dead. Alternatively, the GM could apply the debilitated condition to the NPC, with the same effect as it would have on a PC.

ATTACK MODIFIERS AND SPECIAL SITUATIONS

In combat situations, many modifiers might come into play. Although the GM is at liberty to assess whatever modifiers they think are appropriate to the situation (that's their role in the game), the following suggestions and guidelines might make that easier. Often the modifier is applied as a step in difficulty. So if a situation hinders attacks, that means if a PC attacks an NPC, the difficulty of the attack roll is increased by one step, and if an NPC attacks a PC, the difficulty of the defense roll is eased. This is because players make all rolls, whether they are attacking or defending—NPCs never make attack or defense rolls.



Precise ranges are not important. The broadly defined “immediate,” “short,” “long,” and “very long” ranges let the GM quickly make a judgment call and keep things moving. Basically, the idea is: your target is right there, your target is close, your target is pretty far away, or your target is extremely far away.

Movement, page 147

The GM might allow a character with a ranged weapon to attack beyond extreme range, but the attack would be hindered by two steps for each range category beyond the normal limit. Attacks with hard limits, such as the blast radius of a bomb, can't be modified.

In certain situations, such as a PC on top of a building looking across an open field, the GM should allow ranged attacks to exceed their maximum range. For example, in perfect conditions, a good archer can hit a large target with a bow and arrow at 500 feet (150 m), much farther than a bow's typical long range.

When in doubt, if it seems like it should be harder to attack in a situation, hinder the attack rolls. If it seems like attacks should gain an advantage or be easier in some way, hinder the defense rolls.

COVER

If a character is behind cover so that a significant portion of their body is behind something sturdy, attacks against the character are hindered.

If a character is entirely behind cover (their entire body is behind something sturdy), they can't be attacked unless the attack can go through the cover. For example, if a character hides behind a thin wooden screen and their opponent shoots the screen with an arrow that can penetrate the wood, the character can be attacked. However, because the attacker can't see the character clearly, this still counts as cover (attacks against the character are hindered).

POSITION

Sometimes where a character stands gives them an advantage or a disadvantage.

Prone Target: In melee, a prone target is easier to hit (attacks against them are eased). In ranged combat, a prone target is harder to hit (attacks against them are hindered).

Higher Ground: In either ranged or melee combat, attacks by an opponent who is on higher ground are eased.

SURPRISE

When a target isn't aware of an incoming attack, the attacker has an advantage. A ranged sniper in a hidden position, an invisible assailant, or the first salvo in a successful ambush are all eased by two steps. For the attacker to gain this advantage, however, the defender truly must have no idea that the attack is coming.

If the defender isn't sure of the attacker's location but is still on guard, the attacks are eased by only one step.

RANGE

In melee, you can attack a foe who is adjacent to you (next to you) or within reach (immediate range). If you enter into melee with one or more foes, usually you can attack most or all of the combatants, meaning they are next to you, within reach, or within reach

if you move slightly or have a long weapon that extends your reach.

The majority of ranged attacks have only two ranges: short range and long range (a few have very long range). Short range is generally less than 50 feet (15 m) or so. Long range is generally from 50 feet (15 m) to about 100 feet (30 m). Very long range is generally 100 feet (30 m) to 500 feet (150 m). Greater precision than that typically isn't important.

If anything is longer than very long range, the exact range is usually spelled out, such as with a rifle that can accurately hit a target 1,000 feet (300 m) away.

Thus, the game has four measurements of distance: immediate, short, long, and very long. These apply to **movement** as well. A few special cases—point-blank range and extreme range—modify an attack's chance to successfully hit.

Point-Blank Range: If a character uses a ranged weapon against a target within immediate range, the attack is eased.

Extreme Range: Targets just at the limit of a weapon's range are at extreme range. Attacks against such targets are hindered.

ILLUMINATION

What characters can see (and how well they can see) plays a huge factor in combat.

Dim Light: Dim light is approximately the amount of light on a night with a bright full moon or the illumination provided by a torch, flashlight, or lamp. Dim light allows you to see out to short range. Targets in dim light are harder to hit. Attacks against such targets are hindered. Attackers trained in low-light spotting negate this modifier.

Very Dim Light: Very dim light is approximately the amount of light on a starry night with no visible moon, or the glow provided by a candle or the embers of a fire. Very dim light allows you to see clearly only within immediate range and perceive vague shapes to short range. Targets in very dim light are harder to hit. Attacks against targets within immediate range are hindered, and attacks against those in short range are hindered by two steps. Attackers trained in low-light spotting modify these difficulties by one step in their favor. Attackers specialized in low-light spotting modify these difficulties by two steps in their favor.

Darkness: Darkness is an area with no illumination at all, such as a moonless night with cloud cover, deep in a cave, or a room with no lights. Targets in complete darkness are nearly impossible to hit. If an attacker can use other senses (such as hearing) to get an idea of where the opponent might be, attacks against such targets are hindered by four steps. Otherwise, attacks in complete darkness fail without the need for a roll unless the player spends 1 XP to “make a lucky shot” or the GM uses **GM intrusion**. Attackers trained in low-light spotting ease the task. Attackers specialized in low-light spotting ease the task by two steps.

VISIBILITY

Similar to illumination, factors that obscure vision affect combat.

Mist and Fog: A target in mist or fog is similar to one in dim light. Ranged attacks against such targets are hindered. Particularly dense mist makes ranged attacks nearly impossible (treat as darkness), and even melee attacks are hindered.

Hiding Target: A target in dense foliage, behind a screen, or crawling through rubble is hard to hit because they’re hard to see. Ranged attacks against such targets are hindered.

Invisible Target: If an attacker can use other senses (such as hearing) to get an idea of where the opponent might be, attacks against such targets are hindered by four steps. Otherwise, attacks against an invisible creature fail without the need for a roll unless the player spends 1 XP to “make a lucky shot” or the GM uses **GM intrusion**.

WATER

Generally speaking, being in shallow water can make it hard to move, but it doesn’t affect combat. Being in deep water can make things difficult, and being underwater entirely can seem as different as being on another world.

Deep Water: Being in water up to your chest (or the equivalent thereof) hinders your attacks.

Underwater Melee Combat: Being completely underwater typically makes attacking very difficult. Attacks with stabbing weapons are hindered, and melee attacks with slashing or bashing weapons are hindered by two steps.

Underwater Ranged Combat: As with melee combat, most creatures have problems fighting underwater. Some ranged attacks are impossible underwater—you can’t throw things, fire a bow or crossbow, or use a blowgun. Attacks with weapons that do work underwater are hindered. Ranges underwater are reduced by one category; very-long-range weapons work only to long range, long-range weapons work only to short range, and short-range weapons work only to immediate range.

MOVING TARGETS

Moving targets are harder to hit, and moving attackers have a difficult time as well.

Target Is Moving: Attackers trying to hit a foe who is moving very fast are hindered. (A foe moving very fast is one who is doing nothing but running, mounted on a galloping horse, riding in a vehicle or moving conveyance, and so on.)

XP, page 162

GM intrusion, page 162

Invisibility works differently for PCs and NPCs. An invisible PC is specialized in stealth and Speed defense. Attacks against an invisible NPC are hindered by four steps, as described under Invisible Target on this page.



Attacker Is Moving: An attacker trying to make an attack while moving under their own power (walking, running, swimming, and so on) takes no penalties. Attacks from a moving mount or moving vehicle are hindered; an attacker trained in riding or driving ignores this penalty.

Attacker Is Jostled: Being jostled, such as while standing on a listing ship or a vibrating platform, makes attacking difficult. Such attacks are hindered. Characters trained in balancing or sailing ignore penalties for being on a ship.

Slicing Skein, page 38
Shuck, page 373

SPECIAL SITUATION: COMBAT BETWEEN NPCs

When an NPC ally of the PCs attacks another NPC, the GM can designate a player to roll and handle it like a PC attacking. Often, the choice is obvious. For example, a character who has a trained attack animal should roll when their pet attacks enemies. If an NPC ally accompanying the party leaps into the fray, that ally's favorite PC rolls for them. NPCs cannot apply Effort. Of course, it's perfectly fitting (and easier) to have the NPC ally use the **cooperative action rules** to aid a PC instead of making direct attacks, or to compare the levels of the two NPCs (higher wins).

*Cooperative action rules,
page 150*

SPECIAL SITUATION: COMBAT BETWEEN PCs

When one PC attacks another PC, the attacking character makes an attack roll, and the other character makes a defense roll, adding any appropriate modifiers. If the attacking PC has a skill, ability, asset, or other effect that would ease the attack if it were made against an NPC, the character adds 3 to the roll for each step reduction (+3 for one step, +6 for two steps, and so on). If the attacker's final result is higher, the attack hits. If the defender's result is higher, the attack misses. Damage is resolved normally. The GM mediates all special effects.

Damage track, page 141

SPECIAL SITUATION: AREA ATTACKS

Sometimes, an attack or effect affects an area rather than a single target. For example, a bomb or a sea storm can potentially harm or affect everyone in the area.

In an area attack, all PCs in the area make appropriate defense rolls against the attack

to determine its effect on them. If there are any NPCs in the area, the attacker makes a single attack roll against all of them (one roll, not one roll per NPC) and compares it to the target number of each NPC. If the roll is equal to or greater than the target number of a particular NPC, the attack hits that NPC.

Some area attacks always deal at least a minimum amount of damage, even if the attacks miss or if a PC makes a successful defense roll. For example, consider a Sage who uses **Slicing Skein** to attack six **shucks** (level 2; target number 6) and their stalk leader (level 4; target number 12). The PC applies Effort to increase the damage and rolls an 11 for the attack roll. This hits the six shucks but not their leader, so the ability deals 4 points of damage to each of the shucks.

In terms of what happens in the story, the shucks are caught flat-footed by the PC's use of the ability, but the leader anticipates the attack and ducks out of the way.

SPECIAL SITUATION: ATTACKING OBJECTS

Attacking an object is rarely a matter of hitting it. Sure, you can hit the broad side of a barn, but can you damage it? Attacking inanimate objects with a melee weapon is a Might action. Objects have levels and thus target numbers. Objects have a damage track that works like the **damage track** for PCs.

Intact is the default state for an object.

Minor damage is a slightly damaged state. An object with minor damage reduces its level by 1.

Major damage is a critically damaged state. An object with major damage is broken and no longer functions.

Destroyed is destroyed. The object is ruined, no longer functions, and cannot be repaired.

If the Might action to damage an object is a success, the object moves one step down the object damage track. If the Might roll exceeded the difficulty by 2 levels, the object instead moves two steps down the object damage track. If the Might roll exceeded the difficulty by 4 levels, the object instead moves three steps down the object damage track. Objects with minor or major damage can be repaired, moving them one or more steps up the object damage track.

Brittle or fragile objects, like paper or glass, decrease the effective level of the object for the purposes of determining if it is damaged. Hard objects, like those made of shell or stone, add 1 to the effective level. Very hard objects, like those made of metal, add 2.

The tool or weapon used to attack the object must be at least as hard as the object itself. Further, if the amount of damage the attack could inflict—not modified by a special die roll—does not equal or exceed the effective level of the object, the attack cannot damage the object no matter what the roll.

ACTION: ACTIVATE A SPECIAL ABILITY

Special abilities are granted by foci and types, or provided by cyphers or other devices. If a special ability affects another character in any kind of unwanted manner, it's handled as an attack. This is true even if the ability is normally not considered an attack. For example, if a character has a healing touch, and their friend doesn't want to be healed for some reason, an attempt to heal their unwilling friend is handled as an attack.

Plenty of special abilities do not affect another character in an unwanted manner. For example, a Sage might use their **Push** ability to move a boulder or use **Fleet of Foot** to move farther than normal. Neither of these requires an attack roll (although they might require a roll against the level of an object, such as the boulder, to successfully affect it).

If the character spends points to apply Effort on the attempt, they might want to roll anyway to see if they get a **major effect**, which would reduce the cost for their action.

ACTION: MOVE

As a part of another action, a character can adjust their position—stepping back a few feet while using an ability, sliding over in combat to take on a different opponent to help a friend, pushing through a door they just opened, and so on. This is considered an immediate distance, and a character can move this far as part of another action.

In a combat situation, if a character is in a large melee, they're usually considered to be next to most other combatants, unless the

GM rules that they're farther away because the melee is especially large or the situation dictates it.

If they're not in melee but still nearby, they are considered to be a short distance away—usually less than 50 feet (15 m). If they're farther away than that but still involved in the combat, they are considered to be a long distance away, usually 50 to 100 feet (15 to 30 m), or possibly even a very long distance away, usually 100 feet to 500 feet (30 to 150 m).

In a round, as an action, a character can make a short move. In this case, they are doing nothing but moving up to about 50 feet (15 m). Some terrain or situations will change the distance a character can move, but generally, making a short move is considered to be a difficulty 0 action. No roll is needed; they just get where they're going as their action.

A character can try to make a long move—up to 100 feet (30 m) or so—in one round. This is a Speed task with a difficulty of 4. As with any action, they can use skills, assets, or Effort to ease the task. Terrain, obstacles, or other circumstances can hinder the task. A successful roll means the character moved the distance safely. Failure means that at some point during the move, they stop or stumble (the GM determines where this happens).

A character can also try to make a short move and take another (relatively simple) physical action, like make an attack. As with the attempt to make a long move, this is a Speed task with a difficulty of 4, and failure means that the character stops at some point, slipping or stumbling or otherwise getting held up.

LONG-TERM MOVEMENT

When talking about movement in terms of traveling rather than round-by-round action, typical characters can travel on a roadway or path about 20 miles (32 km) per day, averaging about 3 miles (5 km) per hour, including a few stops. When traveling overland, they can move about 12 miles (19 km) per day, averaging 2 miles (3 km) per hour, again with some stops. Other modes of travel (horses, carts, trains, cars, and so on) have their own rates of movement.

Push, page 35

Fleet of Foot, page 44

Major effect, page 134



MOVEMENT MODIFIERS

Different environments affect movement in different ways.

Rough Terrain: A surface that's considered rough terrain is covered in loose stones or other material, uneven or with unsure footing, unsteady, or a surface that requires movement across a narrow space, such as a cramped corridor or a slender ledge. Stairs are also considered rough terrain. Rough terrain does not slow normal movement on a round-by-round basis, but hinders move rolls. Rough terrain cuts long-term movement rates in half.

Difficult Terrain: Difficult terrain is an area filled with challenging obstacles—water up to waist height, a very steep slope, an especially narrow ledge, deep mud, spaces so small that one must crawl through them, and so on. Difficult terrain hinders move rolls and halves movement on a round-by-round basis. This means that a short move is about 25 feet (8 m), and a long move is about 50 feet (15 m). Difficult terrain reduces long-term movement to a third of its normal rate.

Water: Deep water, in which a character is mostly or entirely submerged, hinders move rolls and reduces round-by-round and long-term movement to one quarter its normal rate. This means that a short move is about 12 feet (4 m), and a long move is about 25 feet (8 m). Characters trained in swimming halve their movement only while in deep water.

GRAVITY

Rarely, devices, cyphers, and abilities can change the state of gravity. In those cases, the following applies:

Low Gravity: Movement in low gravity is easier but not much faster. All move rolls are eased.

High Gravity: In an environment of high gravity, treat all moving characters as if they were in difficult terrain. Characters trained in high-gravity maneuvering negate this penalty. High gravity reduces long-term movement to a third of its normal rate.

Zero Gravity: In an environment without gravity, characters cannot move normally. Instead, they must push off from a surface and succeed at a Might roll to move (the

difficulty is equal to one-quarter the distance traveled (in feet). Without a surface to push off from, a character cannot move. Unless the character's movement takes them to a stable object that they can grab or land against, they continue to drift in that direction each round, traveling half the distance of the initial push.

SPECIAL SITUATION: A CHASE

When a PC is chasing an NPC or vice versa, the player should attempt a Speed action, with the difficulty based on the NPC's level. If the PC succeeds at the roll, they catch the NPC (if chasing), or they get away (if chased). In terms of the story, this one-roll mechanic can be the result of a long chase over many rounds.

Alternatively, if the GM wants to play out a long chase, the character can make many rolls (perhaps one per level of the NPC) to finish the pursuit successfully. For every failure, the PC must make another success, and if they ever have more failures than successes, the PC fails to catch the NPC (if chasing) or is caught (if chased). As with combat, the GM is encouraged to describe the results of these rolls with flavor. A success might mean the PC has rounded a corner and gained some distance. A failure might mean that a basket of fruit topples over in front of them, slowing them down.

Chases involving horses, cars, trains, and other **vehicles** are handled similarly.

ACTION: WAIT

You can wait to react to another character's action.

You decide what action will trigger your action, and if the triggering action happens, you get to take your action first (unless going first wouldn't make sense, like attacking a foe before they come into view). For example, if you startle a black bear and the creature threatens you but doesn't yet attack, on your turn you can decide to wait, stating, "If it attacks me, I'm going to fire my gun." On the black bear's turn, it attacks, so you're able to make your attack before that happens.

Waiting is also a good way to deal with a ranged attacker who rises from behind cover, fires an attack, and ducks back down. You could say, "I wait to see them pop up from behind cover and then I shoot them with my bow."

ACTION: DEFEND

Defending is a special action that only PCs can do, and only in response to being attacked. In other words, an NPC uses its action to attack, which forces a PC to make a defense roll. This is handled like any other kind of action, with circumstances, skill, assets, and Effort all potentially coming into play. Defending is a special kind of action in that it does not happen on the PC's turn. It's never an action that a player decides to take; it's always a reaction to an attack. A PC can attempt a defense task when attacked (on the attacking NPC's turn) and still take another action on their own turn.

The type of defense roll depends on the type of attack. If a foe attacks a character with an axe, they can use Speed to duck or block it with what they're holding. If a PC is struck by a poisoned dart, they can use a Might action to resist its effects. If a character's mind is threatened by a creature's mental attack, they can use Intellect to fend off the effects.

Sometimes an attack provokes two defense tasks. For example, a poisonous reptile tries to bite a PC. The character tries to dodge the bite with a Speed action. If they fail, they take damage from the bite, and they must also attempt a Might action to resist the poison's effects.

If a character does not know an attack is coming, usually they can still make a defense roll, but they can't add modifiers (including the modifier from a shield), and they can't use any skill or Effort to ease the task. If circumstances warrant—such as if the attacker is right next to the character—the GM might rule that the surprise attack simply hits.

A character can always choose to forgo a defense task, in which case the attack automatically hits.

Some abilities (such as **Unbind**) may allow you to do something special as a defense task.

In some fights, it might be to your advantage to help another PC who is more effective in combat than you are, either by helping them attack or by distracting their opponent. Just because you're not making an attack roll doesn't mean you're not contributing to your party's success.

Vehicle chases, page 157

Waiting is also a useful tool for cooperative actions (page 150).

Unbind, page 38

ACTION: DO SOMETHING ELSE

Players can try anything they can think of, although that doesn't mean anything is possible. The GM sets the difficulty—that's their primary role in the game. Still, guided by the bounds of logic, players and GMs will find all manner of actions and options that aren't covered by a rule. That's a good thing.

Players should not feel constrained by the game mechanics when taking actions. Skills are not required to attempt an action. Someone who's never climbed a cliff can still try. The GM might hinder the task, but the character can still attempt the action.

Thus, players and GMs can return to the beginning of this chapter and look at the most basic expression of the rules. A player wants to take an action. The GM decides, on a scale of 1 to 10, how difficult that task is and what stat it uses. The player determines whether they have anything that might modify the difficulty and considers whether to apply Effort. Once the final determination is made, they roll to see if their character succeeds. It's as easy as that.

As further guidance, the following are some of the more common actions a player might take.

CLIMBING

When a character climbs, the GM sets a difficulty based on the surface being climbed. Climbing is like moving through **difficult terrain**: the move roll is hindered and the movement is half speed. Unusual circumstances, such as climbing while under fire, pose additional step penalties.

CLIMBING DIFFICULTY

Difficulty	Surface
2	Surface with lots of handholds
3	Stone wall or similar surface (a few handholds)
4	Crumbling or slippery surface
5	Smooth stone wall or similar surface
6	Rough metal wall or similar surface
8	Smooth, horizontal surface (climber is upside down)
10	Smooth wall, window, or similar surface

Players are not rewarded with XP for killing foes in combat, so using a smart idea to avoid combat and still succeed is just good play. Likewise, coming up with an idea to defeat a foe without hammering on it with weapons is encouraged—creativity is not cheating!

Inability, page 129

Trained, page 129
Specialized, page 129

Difficult terrain, page 148

COOPERATIVE ACTIONS

There are many ways multiple characters can work together. None of these options, however, can be used at the same time by the same characters.

Helping: If you use your action to help someone with a task, you ease the task. If you have an **inability** in a task, your help has no effect. If you use your action to help someone with a task that you are **trained** or **specialized** in, the task is eased by two steps. Help is considered an asset, and someone receiving help usually can't gain more than two assets on a single task if that help is provided by another character.

For example, if Jesco is trying to climb a steep incline and Madge (who is trained in climbing) spends their turn helping him, Jesco's task is eased by two steps.

Sometimes you can help by performing a task that complements what another person is attempting. If your complementary action succeeds, you ease the other person's task. For example, if Jesco tries to persuade a train conductor to let him on board, Madge could try to supplement Jesco's words with a flattering lie about the conductor (a deception action), a display of knowledge about the region where the train is headed (a geography action), or a direct threat to the conductor (an intimidation action). If Madge's roll is a success, Jesco's persuasion task is eased.

Distraction: When a character uses their turn to distract a foe, that foe's attacks are hindered for one round. Multiple characters distracting a foe have no greater effect than a single character doing so—a foe is either distracted or not. A distraction might be yelling a challenge, firing a warning shot, or a similar activity that doesn't harm the foe.

Draw the Attack: When an NPC attacks a character, another PC can prominently present themselves, shout taunts, and move to try to get the foe to attack them instead. In most cases, this action succeeds without a roll—the opponent attacks the prominent PC instead of their companions. In other cases, such as with intelligent or determined foes, the prominent character must succeed at an Intellect action to draw the attack. If

that Intellect action is successful, the foe attacks the prominent character, whose defenses are hindered by two steps. Two characters attempting to draw an attack at the same time cancel each other out.

Take the Attack: A character can use their action to throw themselves in front of a foe's successful attack to save a nearby comrade. The attack automatically succeeds against the sacrificial character, and it deals 1 additional point of damage. A character cannot willingly take more than one attack each round in this way.

CRAFTING, BUILDING, AND REPAIRING

Crafting is a tricky topic because the same rules that govern building a simple weapon like a wooden spear also cover repairing a device that lets characters talk to the dead. Normally, the level of the item determines the difficulty of creating or repairing it as well as the time required. For cyphers, artifacts, and other items that require specialized knowledge, or items previously unknown or unexamined, add 5 to the item's level to determine the difficulty of building or repairing it.

Characters can attempt to craft almost anything, given enough time, resources, experience, and knowledge. They may decide they want to raise a barn for a family member, build a schoolhouse for the community, or craft a cart for carrying their supplies.

Of course, the GM is free to overrule some attempts at creation, building, or repair, requiring that the character have a certain level of skill, proper tools and materials, and so forth. The GM may also decide that there is something in the setting that is too strange, too alien, too powerful, or too dangerous for PCs to mess around with (or at least mess around with easily).

A level 0 object requires no skill to make and is easily found in most locations. Sling stones and firewood are level 0 items—producing them is routine. Making a torch from spare wood and oil-soaked cloth is simple, so it's a level 1 object. Making an arrow or a spear is fairly standard but not simple, so it's a level 2 object.

Generally speaking, a device to be crafted requires materials equal to its level and

all the levels below it. So a level 5 device requires level 5 material, level 4 material, level 3 material, level 2 material, and level 1 material (and, technically, level 0 material).

The GM and players can gloss over much of the crafting details, if desired. Gathering all the materials to make a mundane item might not be worth playing out—but then again, it might be. For example, making a wooden spear in a forest isn't very interesting, but what if the characters have to make a spear while underground? Finding the wreckage of something made of wood or forcing a PC to fashion a spear out of the bones of a large beast could create interesting situations.

The time required to create an item is up to the GM, but the guidelines in the **crafting table** are a good starting point. Generally, repairing an item takes somewhere between half the creation time and the full creation time, depending on the item, the aspect that needs repairing, and the circumstances. For example, if creating an item takes one hour, repairing it takes thirty minutes to one hour.

Circumstances really matter. For example, sewing an outfit by hand might take five times as long (or more) as using a sewing machine. Building a barn in perfect weather with all of the necessary parts and help is much quicker than building one during a storm with just two characters and makeshift parts.

Sometimes, if the item is artistic or intricate in nature, the GM will add to the difficulty and time required. For example, a crude wooden stool might be hammered together in an hour. A beautiful finished piece might take a week or longer and would require more skill on the part of the crafter.

Sometimes a GM will allow a rush job if the circumstances warrant it. This is different from using skill to reduce the time required. In this case, the quality of the item is affected. Let's say that a character needs to create a tool that will cut through a rock wall (a level 7 item), but they have to do it in one day. The GM might allow it, but the device might be extremely volatile, inflicting damage on the user, or it might work only once. The device is still considered a level 7 item to create in all other respects.

Sometimes the GM will rule that reducing the time is not possible. For example, most

Players are encouraged to come up with their own ideas for what their characters do rather than looking at a list of possible actions. That's why there is a "do something else" action. PCs are not pieces on a game board—they are people in a story. And like real people, they can try anything they can think of. (Succeeding is another matter entirely.) The task difficulty system provides GMs with the tools they need to adjudicate anything the players come up with.

Crafting Difficulty and Time table, page 152

CRAFTING DIFFICULTY AND TIME

Difficulty	Craft	General Time to Build
0	Something extremely simple like tying a rope or finding an appropriately sized rock	A few minutes at most
1	Torch	Five minutes
2	Spear, simple shelter, piece of furniture	One hour
3	Bow, door, basic article of clothing	One day
4	Sword, leather vest	One to two days
5	Nice piece of jewelry or art object, simple boat or cart	One week
6	Really nice piece of jewelry or art object, elegant craftwork, medium boat or cart	One month
7	Building, major work of art	One year
8	Complex building or structure, complex boat or cart	Many years
9	Complex building or structure, complex boat or cart	Many years
10	Complex building or structure, complex boat or transportation device	Many years

Crafts Powerful Objects,
page 91

characters can't make an ornate piece of jewelry in one hour without some kind of device (or group) to help.

Possible crafting skills include:

- Armoring
- Blacksmithing
- Bowyer/fletching
- Carpentry
- Chemistry
- Cooking
- Glassforging
- Leatherworking
- Metalworking
- Weaponsmithing
- Woodcrafting

TINKERING

Characters might try to make a cypher, an artifact, or another crafted item do something other than its intended function. Sometimes, the GM will simply declare the task impossible. You can't turn a bunting crown into a witch cake. But most of the time, there is a chance of success.

That said, tinkering with weird stuff is not easy. Obviously, the difficulty varies from situation to situation, but difficulties starting at 7 are not unreasonable. The time, tools, and training required would be similar to the time, tools, and training needed to repair a device. If the tinkering results in a long-term benefit for the character—such as creating an artifact that they can use—the GM should require them to **spend** XP to make it.

Scent hound, page 326

Spending XP, page 164
Witch ward, page 329

CRAFTING CYPHERS AND ARTIFACTS

Many players love the prospect of being able to create powerful objects such as cyphers and artifacts for their character and other PCs in the group. And, of course, a character who **Crafts Powerful Objects** will likely be doing this regularly.

There are many reasons characters might want to create their own cyphers and artifacts.

Preparation: The PCs might know they're about to face a specific threat or obstacle and want to be sure they have certain cyphers to deal with it. For example, if they know they'll be spending a lot of time down in a dark mine or cave, they may want to have enough **scent hound** cyphers for everyone in the group. The GM could let them discover a cache of scent hounds before they enter the mines or have a friendly NPC provide them with the cyphers, but it can be a lot of fun for a crafty PC to make the items the group needs.

Character Theme: A character might consider a specific cypher part of their theme and want to keep it on hand. For example, a character who has a strong fear of witches might want to always have a **witch ward** on hand to protect them. In this situation where repeated use of a kind of cypher is almost like a character's type or focus ability, the GM should consider allowing the character to become trained (and eventually maybe even specialized) in making that specific cypher.



Favorite Skill: Some players just like the idea of playing a character who can craft things for themselves and their allies—crafting is their theme. For these players, finding the cyphers they need isn't as fun as knowing that their character crafted the items. Even if crafting isn't as fast or efficient as finding a bunch of cyphers, the appeal to the player is their personal connection with the creative process. As with the other two examples, it's good to enable this sort of character option—let the player have fun playing the kind of character they want to play.

Power: The PCs might find a cypher that's especially useful—and perhaps it's too powerful to let them have easy access to it. The GM can limit this somewhat by increasing the level at which it must be crafted, which increases the time and material cost needed to make it; the GM should explain to the players that the change is being made to prevent things from getting too easy for the PCs.

Alternatively, the GM could limit access to the expensive materials required to make

that cypher. Perhaps the necessary herb is becoming scarce because people have been harvesting too much of it, or the weather hasn't been right for it to grow properly, or it's a favorite snack of creatures that have recently moved into the area. The trick is to reduce access to the cypher through story elements so the crafting player doesn't feel like they're being punished.

CRAFTING CYPHERS

Crafting magical cyphers is a slightly more complicated task than climbing or persuading. Once you've found the game stats for a cypher you want to make, creating it involves four steps.

1. Choose Cypher Level. Creating a low-level cypher is easier than creating a high-level one. The character decides what level of cypher they're trying to create, which must be in the level range for the cypher as noted in the [cypher section](#). Note that some cyphers have the same effect no matter what level they are, so the character could make crafting

*A Selection of Cyphers,
page 315*

easier by creating the lowest-level version of that cypher, but the GM is always able to rule that a particular cypher must be crafted at a certain level or higher for it to work.

2. Determine Materials. Just as crafting an axe requires iron and wood, crafting a cypher requires specific materials—bone, nails, mirrors, salt, coal, herbs, and so on. These items can be bought, bargained for, or gathered, depending on the item and the character's skills and needs. The level of the cypher determines how expensive or difficult these materials are to obtain, according to the table below.

If characters are gathering or searching for materials rather than purchasing them, just have them make a roll to see if they find it, based on the table below. They must be in an appropriate area (it's hard to gather herbs while you're inside someone's home or to find cemetery dirt if you're not in a cemetery), most items can be found as a single action, and any assets or skills (such as being specialized in perception) help ease the task.

If a PC wants to gather or find enough items for multiple cyphers, increase the level by 1 for each additional amount of materials rather than have them make multiple rolls. So if they want to gather enough herbs to create three level 3 cyphers, they need to succeed on a level 5 roll.

3. Assess Difficulty. The difficulty of a cypher crafting task is always equal to 1 + the level of the cypher. The crafter can reduce the assessed difficulty of a crafting task

with skill training (such as being trained or specialized in crafting cyphers), assets, special abilities provided by their focus or type, and so on. Using a formula, recipe, or other guideline for a specific cypher counts as an asset for this purpose.

Because this is an activity requiring special knowledge, it's not possible for a character with no skill (or with an inability in this skill) to do this sort of crafting; they can't attempt the task at all.

For example, William wants to create a level 6 **snakebite tincture**. A level 6 potion has an assessed difficulty of 7 (1 + the level of the cypher). William is trained in crafting cyphers, so the assessed difficulty is lowered to 6. If they also use a recipe they found in a book, the assessed difficulty becomes 5.

4. Determine Time to Craft. The amount of time it takes to craft a cypher is determined by the assessed difficulty, so decreasing the assessed difficulty not only means the character is more likely to succeed, but also that they have to spend less time on crafting it. See the table on page 155.

For any time in excess of nine hours, the process is assumed to have stages where the character is not actively working on it, just checking on it occasionally to make sure everything is going as planned—allowing the ingredients to combine in the necessary way, waiting for the right time of day, and so on. In other words, the character is able to perform other actions in the vicinity of the crafting (such as studying, resting, eating, and so on).

Snakebite tincture, page 327



Cypher Level Materials Cost

1	One inexpensive item / one level 2 item
2	Two inexpensive items / two level 2 items or one level 3 item
3	One moderate item / one level 3 item
4	Two moderate items / two level 3 items or one level 4 item
5	Three moderate items / three level 3 items or two level 4 items or one level 5 item
6	One expensive item / one level 4 item
7	Two expensive items / two level 4 items or one level 5 item
8	Three expensive items / three level 4 items or two level 5 items or one level 6 item
9	One very expensive item / one level 6 item
10	Two very expensive items / two level 6 items or one level 7 item

In our previous potion example, the assessed difficulty is 5, so William's time to craft is one day.

Assessed Difficulty	Time to Craft
1	Ten minutes
2	One hour
3	Four hours
4	Nine hours
5	One day
6	Two days
7	One week
8	Three weeks
9	Two months
10	Six months

CRAFTING ARTIFACTS

Crafting an artifact is similar to choosing a new type or focus ability—the character has many to choose from, they select the one that best fits their intention, and thereafter they can use the artifact much like they'd use any of their other character abilities. The main difference is that most artifacts don't cost Pool points to activate, and character abilities don't have a come due stat that eventually removes them from play.

Crafting artifacts is handled as a long-term benefit of character advancement; the character and GM agree on the artifact to be crafted, and the character spends 3 XP. If the item is fairly simple, the GM can skip the crafting details and just say that after a period of time, the PC creates the artifact.

For an item that significantly alters gameplay—granting the character large amounts of Armor or giving them the ability to teleport at will—the GM can give the item an assessed difficulty equal to 3 + the artifact level and require the character to follow the crafting steps for creating a cypher. Crafting this kind of artifact takes up to five times as many materials and up to twenty times as long as crafting a cypher of the same assessed difficulty.

GUARDING

In a combat situation, a character can stand guard as their action. They do not make attacks, but all their defense tasks are eased. Further, if an NPC tries to get by them or take an action that they are guarding against, the character can attempt an eased Speed action based on the level of the NPC. Success means the NPC is prevented from taking the action; the NPC's action that turn is wasted. This is useful for blocking a doorway, guarding a friend, and so forth.

If an NPC is standing guard, use the same procedure, but to get past the guard, the PC attempts a hindered Speed action against the NPC. For example, Ruby is an NPC human with a level 3 bodyguard. The bodyguard uses their action to guard Ruby. If a PC wants to attack Ruby, the PC first must succeed at a difficulty 4 Speed task to get past the guard. If the PC succeeds, they can make their attack normally.

HEALING

You can administer aid through bandaging, herbs, and other succor, attempting to heal each patient once per day. This healing restores points to a stat Pool of your choice. Decide how many points you want to heal, and then make an Intellect action with a difficulty equal to that number. For example, if you want to heal someone for 3 points, that's a difficulty 3 task with a target number of 9.

INTERACTING WITH CREATURES

The level of the creature determines the target number, just as with combat. Thus, bribing a guard works much like punching them or affecting them with an ability. This is true of persuading someone, intimidating someone, calming a wild beast, or anything of the kind. Interaction is an Intellect task. Interacting usually requires a common language or some other way to communicate. Learning new languages is the same as learning a new skill.

JUMPING

Decide how far you want to jump, and that sets the difficulty of your Might roll. For a standing jump, subtract 4 from the distance in feet to determine the difficulty of the jump. For example, jumping 10 feet (3 m) has a difficulty of 6.

If you run an immediate distance before jumping, it counts as an asset, easing the jump.

If you run a short distance before jumping, divide the jump distance (in feet) by 2 and then subtract 4 to determine the difficulty of the jump. Because you're running an immediate distance (and then some), you also count your running as an asset. For example, jumping a distance of 20 feet (6 m) with a short running start has a difficulty of 5 (20 feet divided by 2 is 10, minus 4 is 6, minus 1 for running an immediate distance).

For a vertical jump, the distance you clear (in feet) is equal to the difficulty of the jumping task. If you run an immediate distance, it counts as an asset, easing the jump.

There's nothing wrong with the GM simply assigning a difficulty level to a jump without worrying about the precise distance. The rules here are just so everyone has some guidelines.

LOOKING OR LISTENING

Generally, the GM will describe any sight or sound that's not purposefully difficult to detect. But if you want to look for a hidden enemy, search for a secret panel, or listen for someone sneaking up on you, make an Intellect roll. If it's a creature, its level determines the difficulty of your roll. If it's something else, the GM determines the difficulty of your roll.

MOVING A HEAVY OBJECT

You can push or pull something very heavy and move it an immediate distance as your action.

The weight of the object determines the difficulty of the Might roll to move it; every 50 pounds (22 kg) hinders the task by one step. So moving something that weighs 150 pounds (68 kg) is difficulty 3, and moving something that weighs 400 pounds (180 kg) is difficulty 8. If you can ease the task difficulty to 0, you can move a heavy object up to a short distance as your action.



OPERATING OR DISABLING A DEVICE, OR PICKING A LOCK

As with figuring out a device, the level of the device usually determines the difficulty of the Intellect roll. Unless a device is very complex, the GM will often rule that once you figure it out, no roll is needed to operate it except under special circumstances. So if the PCs figure out how to use an artifact, they can operate it. If they are attacked, they might need to roll to ensure that they don't crash a vehicle into something while trying to avoid being hit.

Unlike operating a device, disabling a device or picking a lock usually require rolls. These actions often involve special tools and assume that the character is not trying to destroy the device or lock. (A PC who is attempting to destroy it probably should make a Might roll to smash it rather than a Speed or Intellect roll requiring patience and know-how.)

RIDING OR DRIVING

If you're riding an animal that's trained to be a mount or driving a vehicle, you don't need to make a roll to do something routine such as going from point A to point B (just as you wouldn't need to make a roll to walk there). However, staying mounted during a fight or doing something tricky with a vehicle requires a Speed roll to succeed. A saddle or other appropriate gear is an asset and eases the task.

SNEAKING

The difficulty of sneaking by a creature is determined by its level. Sneaking is a Speed task. Moving at half speed eases the task. Appropriate camouflage or other gear may count as an asset and ease the task, as will dim lighting conditions and having plenty of things to hide behind.

SWIMMING

If you're simply swimming from one place to another, such as across a calm river, use the standard movement rules, noting the fact that your character is in deep water. However, sometimes, special circumstances require a Might roll to make progress while swimming, such as when trying to avoid a current or being dragged into a whirlpool.

RIDING OR DRIVING DIFFICULTY

Difficulty	Maneuver
0	Riding
1	Staying on a mount (including a motorcycle or similar vehicle) in a battle or other difficult situation
3	Staying on a mount (including a motorcycle or similar vehicle) when you take damage
4	Mounting a moving steed or vehicle
4	Making an abrupt turn with a vehicle while moving fast
4	Getting a vehicle to move twice as fast as normal for one round
5	Coaxing a mount to move or jump twice as fast or far as normal for one round
5	Making a long jump with a vehicle not intended to go airborne and remaining in control

UNDERSTANDING, IDENTIFYING, OR REMEMBERING

When characters try to identify or figure out how to use a device, the level of the device determines the difficulty. For a bit of knowledge, the GM determines the difficulty.

Difficulty	Knowledge
0	Common knowledge
1	Simple knowledge
3	Something a scholar probably knows
5	Something even a scholar might not know
7	Knowledge very few people possess
10	Completely lost knowledge

VEHICULAR MOVEMENT

Vehicles move just like creatures. Each has a movement rate, which indicates how far it can move in a round. Most vehicles require a driver or pilot, and when moving, they usually require that whoever is at the helm spends every action controlling the movement. This is a routine task that rarely requires a roll. Any round not spent driving the vehicle hinders the task in the next round and precludes any change in speed or direction. In other words, riding down a road normally or piloting a watercraft through still water is difficulty 0. Spending an action to retrieve a

When sneaking, it's possible to use Intellect instead of Speed, if you can convince the GM that you're sneaking by smartly using shadows, external sound, and other elements to your benefit.

pack on the seat behind the character means that in the following round, the driver must attempt a difficulty 1 task. If they instead use their action to pull a weapon from the backpack, in the next round the difficulty to drive will be 2, and so on. Failure results are based on the situation but might involve a collision or something similar.

In a vehicular chase, drivers attempt Speed actions just like in a regular chase, but the task may be based either on the level of the driver (modified by the level and movement rate of the vehicle) or on the level of the vehicle (modified by the level of the driver). So if a PC driving a horse-drawn cart is chasing a level 3 NPC driving a level 5 horse-drawn cart, the PC would make three chase rolls with a difficulty of 5. If the PC's cart is a souped-up custom vehicle, it might grant the PC an asset in the chase. If the PC is not in a cart at all, but running after it or riding a bicycle, it might hinder the chase rolls by two or three steps, or the GM might simply rule that it's impossible.

VEHICULAR COMBAT

Much of the time, a fight between foes in carts, cars, or other vehicles is just like any other combat situation. The combatants probably have cover and are moving fast. Attacks to disable a vehicle or a portion of it are based on the level of the vehicle. A vehicle might have some type of protective plating or material that acts as Armor, similar to a creature.

The only time this isn't true is with battles where only vehicles and not characters are involved. Thus, if the PCs are in a fight with some rivals, and both groups are driving carts, use the standard rules. However, battles between other kinds of vehicles could occur. If PCs are involved in combat while they are entirely enclosed in cars, trains, and so on (so that it's not really the characters

fighting, but the vehicles), use the following quick and easy guidelines.

On this scale, combat between vehicles isn't like traditional combat. Don't worry about health, Armor, or anything like that. Instead, just compare the levels of the vehicles involved. If the PCs' vehicle has the higher level, the difference in levels is how many steps the PCs' attack and defense rolls are eased. If the PCs' vehicle has the lower level, their rolls are hindered. If the levels are the same, there is no modification.

These attack and defense rolls are modified by skill and Effort, as usual. Some vehicles also have superior weapons, which ease the attack (since there is no "damage" amount to worry about), but this circumstance is probably uncommon in this abstract system and should not affect the difficulty by more than one or maybe two steps.

Further, if two vehicles coordinate their attack against one vehicle, the attack is eased. If three or more vehicles coordinate, the attack is eased by two steps.

The attacker must try to target a specific system on or portion of an enemy vehicle. This hinders the attack based on the system or portion targeted (see the Targeting Task Attacks and Effects table on this page).

It's important to remember that a failed attack doesn't always mean a miss. The target ship might rock and reel from the hit, but the bulk of the damage could be absorbed by the hull, so there's no significant damage.

This bare-bones system should allow the GM and players to flesh out exciting encounters involving the whole group. For example, perhaps while one PC pilots a watercraft, another controls the guns, and another frantically attempts to repair damage to the steering mechanism before they crash into the dock they've been trying to defend.

TARGETING TASK ATTACKS AND EFFECTS

Targeting Task	Attack Hindered	Effect
Disable weapons (if applicable)	Two steps	One or more of the vehicle's weapons no longer function
Disable defenses (if applicable)	Two steps	Attacks against the vehicle are eased
Disable engine/motor	Three steps	Vehicle cannot move, or movement is hampered
Disable maneuverability	Two steps	Vehicle cannot alter its present course
Strike power core or vital spot	Five steps	Vehicle is completely destroyed

OPTIONAL RULE: GAINING INSIGHT

Sometimes GMs like to keep lots of mystery in their games and present the players with many unknowns. This can be fun, and it's realistic—there's always some unknown factor in any situation that can creep up and cause trouble. And trouble is good because it makes things more interesting. These unknown factors are usually best portrayed as GM intrusions.

However, when a master thief plans to break into a vault and steal the device kept there, they don't go in unless they are sure. They might know exactly what sorts of alarms are rigged to the door, or what schedule the guards follow when patrolling. This isn't guesswork. The thief knows these things for certain. That's how they came up with their break-in plan in the first place. It's what separates the master thief from bumbling criminals.

Similarly, the PCs are competent individuals—sometimes even experts—and such people can make decisions and devise plans with confidence. Yet players often find this difficult for two reasons. First, while their characters might be world-class con artists, lawyers, or creature hunters, the players are not. And second, they're hindered by all the previously mentioned unknowns.

This is why PCs can gain Insights to help them. If a character is thinking about a plan, doing research, gathering information, tracking a creature, or scouting ahead, they can spend 3 Intellect points and one action to gain a single bit of special knowledge from the GM that they can count on with certainty. Insights are always presented as absolutes, and once established, they should never be changed, unless it is through the direct and deliberate intervention of the PCs.

For example, let's say the PCs gain an Insight that giving someone who's guarding a building a bottle of alcohol at sundown ensures that the guard will be drunk by the time they try to infiltrate the place. If they then kill that guard and a new one is stationed there, the Insight is invalidated and all bets are off. (Likewise if they do something that prevents the guard from drinking the alcohol.) Either way, it changes only because the PCs changed it deliberately. Thus, they know for certain, ahead of time, that the Insight has become invalid.

SAMPLE INSIGHTS

- The business owner won't retaliate if they think their partner is involved.
- The guard at the prison always falls asleep after a big lunch.
- There must be a secret room at the center of the level because the walls don't match up.
- That foreman can't be bribed.
- The train conductor knows who the murderer is.
- A particular miner sneaks away from work every Tuesday at 2.
- The bridge will collapse if more than one person walks across it.
- The kidnappers are holding the children as far away from the farm as possible.
- The blacksmith's assistant is fiercely loyal and will never betray them.
- The salesman left three days ago, traveling west across the desert.
- A clerk who works at the local store was seen skulking around the well prior to the accident.
- The thieves couldn't be more than an hour's walk away.

If there are no Insights to be gained in a particular situation (or no more Insights to be gained), the PC looking for one still loses the Intellect points.

Insights are never an end in themselves—they are a means to an end. If the whole point of an adventure is to identify a thief, the characters can't get an Insight to learn the thief's identity. They could, however, use Insights to help them along. For example, they might learn that the thief is left-handed, or that the chef is definitely *not* the thief.

Ultimately, the GM decides each Insight's revelation, so there's no chance that the PCs will gain too much information (if such a thing is even possible). But GMs are highly, highly encouraged to give a valuable Insight if the characters look for one (by spending Intellect points and an action), even if it must be made up on the spot. Doing so allows the players to make intelligent plans and feel confident and—more important—competent.

The cost of gaining an Insight is not reduced by any Edge you may have.

GM-INSTIGATED INSIGHTS

Sometimes, the GM can flag a potential Insight to a player in a given area. Usually, this is something the GM has specifically

Short-term benefit, page 164

designed ahead of time for this purpose. After the PCs have explored an area and are ready to leave, the GM might say, “There’s an Insight can’t be gained by spending Intellect points. Instead, if the character wants to follow up on the GM’s comment, they spend 2 XP as if they were buying a **short-term benefit**. No player is required to make this expenditure—they can always choose to not spend the XP and not learn that Insight.

OPTIONAL RULE: GETTING AN XP ADVANCE

By introducing a story complication based on their character’s background, a player can start the game with a significant amount of XP (and can spend them immediately if desired, even to purchase enough benefits to advance to the next tier). The GM has final approval over this option, and it should be used only in groups that don’t insist on all characters having precisely the same power levels. This story-based concept allows a player to create exactly the character they want at the outset at the cost of building a narrative complication into the PC.

For example, a player might want to start the game with an animal companion or a unique family weapon. Under the normal rules, these options aren’t available to a beginning player (unless such a thing is their explanation for a type or focus ability), but they could find or build a companion or weapon given time (and perhaps after spending XP). With the optional rule, the character gets an advance XP amount that can be used to “buy” the companion or weapon, and in exchange, the GM decides they have an inability with all NPC interactions.

As another example, let’s say a player doesn’t want to start by playing a new, young character—they want to play someone who is older and more experienced. Although the Cypher System does not assume that all starting characters are fresh young recruits, the player’s vision doesn’t quite sound like a first-tier character. So the player comes up with a significant drawback, such as a severe addiction to a costly drug, in exchange for an advance of XP that allows them to start at the second tier, with all the benefits of a second-tier character.

The following story complications are worth an advance of 4 to 6 XP:

- People find the character extremely unlikable. No matter what they say or do, intelligent creatures and animals find them unpleasant. All interaction tasks are hindered. Further, the GM should make a default assumption that all people treat the PC with distaste and contempt as a baseline.
- The character has an inability with a significant task, such as attacks, defense, movement, or something of that nature. As a result, all such tasks are hindered.
- The character has an occasionally debilitating condition, such as a bad back, allergies, alcoholism, eating issues, and so on. This problem results in a significant penalty once per session.
- The character is wanted by the law and must keep a low profile. This can cause story-based complications rather than mechanical ones, but it can make life difficult for them at times.
- The character has a defenseless relative or friend who is often at risk. Again, this is not a mechanical issue, but one that will affect how the character is played. At times, they will have to stop what they are doing to help the person out of a jam. At other times, the person’s life might be truly in jeopardy, compelling the PC to action.
- The character must perform a regular action to retain their abilities. For example, each morning, they must create and imbibe a fresh concoction made of hard-to-source ingredients. If they aren’t able to do this, the PC does not have access to their abilities that day.
- The character must have a particular item to be able to use their abilities. For example, they need a certain device, charm, or token that can be lost, stolen, or destroyed. Perhaps the item needs to be replaced or recharged from time to time.

The following story complications are worth an advance of 12 to 20 XP:

- The character has a severe inability with a significant task, such as attacks, defense, movement, or something of that nature. As a result, all such tasks are hindered by two steps.

- The character is wanted by the law and is actively pursued by multiple NPCs. This isn't just a matter of lying low when they are in town. Instead, NPCs will show up at the worst possible times and attempt to abduct them, kill them, or take them to jail.
- The character has a condition such that all tasks involving combat and NPC interaction are hindered.
- The character has a defenseless relative or friend who (for some vital reason) must accompany them at least 75 percent of the time. The character will spend many actions protecting this person instead of doing what they'd rather be doing.
- The character's abilities rely on a rare drug, food, drink, or other item that is difficult to obtain. Without a regular dose of this substance, they are virtually powerless.
- The character made a pact with a creature when they were young, which gave them powers and abilities. Now, to gain any new abilities, they must find the original creature and replicate the process. This is a major mission and could result in a long delay in character advancement (effectively giving them a boost in power at the beginning of the game but no boosts for a long time afterward).

OPTIONAL RULE: SKILLS FROM BACKGROUNDS

A character's background says that they worked with a troupe of traveling musicians and performers when they were younger. But they're an Explorer and there's no way a starting Explorer can begin with singing or dancing as skills. Should they start with those skills? This question has four potential answers.

1. *No.* They might know the basics of the task. However, a skill doesn't represent a simple familiarity, but extensive training, experience, or talent. Not everyone who works in a restaurant is a chef.

2. *Sure.* In the scope of things, will singing or dancing wreck the game or make the character unplayable? Is it unfair to the other players? Probably not. For that matter, the GM could give all the characters a background skill. Require that it ties into

the character's background and doesn't have a lot of direct adventuring applications. For example, a PC can have cooking, animal care, philosophy, or woodworking, but not climbing, sneaking, or anything similar, and certainly not a skill with attack or defense.

3. *Yes.* Use the optional rules for giving experience point advances, where the character takes on a story complication in exchange for receiving 4 XP to buy the new skill (4 XP is the normal cost to buy a new skill as a **character advancement**).

4. *Yes.* Allow the player to have an XP deficit. The character starts with the desired skill, but before they can gain any of the four benefits required to advance to the next tier, they must pay off this deficit. It's probably unwise to allow a character to start with a deficit of greater than 4 XP.

*Character advancement,
page 166*



Chapter 9: EXPERIENCE POINTS

Experience points (XP) are the currency by which players gain benefits for their characters. The most common ways to earn XP are through GM intrusions and by accomplishing things the PCs set out to do. Sometimes experience points are earned during a game session, and sometimes they're earned between sessions. In a typical session, a player might earn 2 to 4 XP, and between sessions, perhaps another 2 XP (on average). The exact amounts depend on the events of the session.

GM INTRUSION

At any time, the GM can introduce an unexpected complication for a character. When they intrude in this way, they must give that character 2 XP. That player, in turn, must immediately give one of those XP to another player and justify the gift (perhaps the other player had a good idea, told a joke, or performed an action that saved a life).

Often, the GM intrudes when a player attempts an action that should be an automatic success. However, the GM is free to intrude at other times. As a general rule, the GM should intrude at least once each session, but no more than once or twice each session per character.

Anytime the GM intrudes, the player can spend 1 XP to refuse the intrusion, though that also means they don't get the 2 XP. If the player has no XP to spend, they can't refuse.

If a player rolls a 1 on a die, the GM can intrude without giving the player any XP.

Example 1: Through skill and the aid of another character, a fourth-tier PC eases a cliff-scaling task from difficulty 2 to difficulty 0. Normally, they would succeed at the task automatically, but the GM intrudes and says,

"No, the cliff is wet and slippery, so you still have to make a roll." As with any difficulty 2 task, the target number is 6. The PC attempts the roll as normal and gains 2 XP because the GM intruded. They immediately give one of those XP to another player.

Example 2: During a fight, a PC swings their axe and damages a foe with a slice across the shoulder. The GM intrudes by saying that the foe turned just as the axe struck, wrenching the weapon from the character's grip and sending it clattering across the floor. The axe comes to a stop about 10 feet (3 m) away. Because the GM intruded, the PC gains 2 XP, and the player immediately gives one of those XP to another player. Now the character must deal with the dropped weapon, perhaps drawing a different weapon or using their next turn to scramble after the axe.

CHARACTER ARCS

Character arcs are the means by which players can invest themselves more in great stories and character depth and development.

Just like in a book or a television show, characters progress through their own personal story and change over time. A PC with a character arc decides for themselves what they do and why. Character arcs are like stated goals for a character, and by progressing toward that goal, the character advances. The key word there is *progressing*. A PC doesn't have to succeed at achieving the goal to earn advancement—it's not an all-or-nothing prospect. Each arc is keyed to a single character, but just like in a book or show, characters can take part in the larger story arc that the whole group participates in, while also progressing in their own personal arc.

For more details on GM intrusion, see page 270.

Character arcs have different steps that mark the character's progress through the arc. Each arc eventually reaches a climax, and then finishes with a step that is a final resolution. Each step reached earns the character 2 XP. Character arcs are the most straightforward way that a character earns XP.

At character creation, a player can choose one character arc for their PC at no cost. Players have the option to not choose one, but it's probably a good idea to do so. First and foremost, it is a character-defining factor. If they begin the campaign with a desire to find the woman who killed their brother, that says a lot about the character: they had a brother, he was likely close to them, he had been in at least one dangerous situation, and the character is probably motivated by anger and revenge, at least somewhat. Even after the character finishes this first arc, they'll undoubtedly have (at least one) more because they can gain new arcs as the campaign progresses.

Once play begins, players can take on a new arc whenever they wish, as fits the character's ongoing story. Taking a new arc costs 1 XP. While there's no hard limit on how many arcs a character can have at one time, realistically most PCs couldn't reasonably have more than three or four.

However, as mentioned above, arcs have a beginning cost that must be paid, reflecting the character's devotion to the goal. The character will earn this investment back (probably many times over) if the arc is completed.

Character arcs are always player-driven. A GM cannot force one on a character. That said, the events in the narrative often present story arc opportunities and inspire character arcs for the PCs. It's certainly in the GM's purview to suggest possible arcs related to the events going on. For example, if the GM presents an encounter in which an NPC wishes to learn from the PC, it might make sense to suggest taking the Teach arc. Whether or not the PC takes on the student, the player doesn't have to adopt the Teach arc unless they want to.

At the end of each session, the players can review the actions their characters took and describe how they might equate to the completion of a step (or possibly more than one step) in their character arc. If the GM agrees, the character gets their reward.

This chapter presents many sample character arcs, starting on page 167.

GM AWARDS

Sometimes, a group will have an adventure that doesn't deal primarily with a PC's character arc. In this case, it's a good idea for the GM to award XP to that character for accomplishing other tasks.

Awards should be based on the answers to *What Do You Do in This Game?* back in part 1: protecting what matters and knowing the unknowable.

Protecting What Matters: Protection can mean many things, including defending a person, home, community, or location from attack; helping put a magical or mechanical defense system in place; or gaining a powerful ally learned in the ways of defense. It could mean teaching a community how to defend themselves, making a bargain with a magical being to protect the local children, or eradicating a pack of dangerous creatures nearby. Maybe you create a shelter against an upcoming storm or help evacuate the town before a forest fire. Typically, these awards are more about defending things other than the PCs, but the key is that the characters are protecting something that truly matters to them.

Knowing the Unknowable: Knowing the unknowable could mean the characters learn something significant about one of the many forces at work in the world; discover a significant new location, such as a secret lair, hidden cave, mysterious mine, or forgotten town; or find a new procedure, device (something too big to be considered a piece of equipment), or previously unknown information. This could include the cure for an illness, a new source of magical power, a long-lost recipe for a powerful cypher, or a secret, adage, or truth. In short, the PCs discover something significant that they can understand and put to use.

Artifacts: When the group gains an artifact, award XP equal to the artifact's level and divide it among the PCs (minimum 1 XP for each character). Round down if necessary. For example, if four PCs discover a level 5

What Do You Do in This Game?, page 6

Typically, PCs will earn about half their total experience points from arcs or other GM awards.

Experience point awards for artifacts should usually apply even if the artifact was given to the PCs rather than found, because often such gifts are the rewards for success.

artifact, they each get 1 XP. Money, standard equipment, and cyphers are not worth XP.

Miscellaneous Discoveries: Various other discoveries might grant 1 XP to each PC involved.

Other Awards: If a character is focused on activities that don't relate to a character arc, protection, or knowing the unknowable, as a general rule, a mission should be worth at least 1 XP per game session involved in accomplishing it. For example, helping your neighbors track down the creature that stole their son might be worth 1 XP for each character.

SPENDING EXPERIENCE POINTS

Experience points are meant to be used. Hoarding them is not a good idea; if a player accumulates more than 10 XP, the GM can require them to spend some.

Generally, experience points can be spent in four ways: immediate benefits, short- and medium-term benefits, long-term benefits, and character advancement.

IMMEDIATE BENEFITS

The most straightforward way for a player to use XP is to reroll any roll in the game—even one that they didn't make. This costs 1 XP per reroll, and the player chooses the best result. They can continue to spend XP on rerolls, but this can quickly become an expensive proposition. It's a fine way to try to prevent disaster, but it's not a good idea to use a lot of XP to reroll a single action over and over.

A player can also spend 1 XP to refuse a GM intrusion.

SHORT- AND MEDIUM-TERM BENEFITS

By spending 2 XP, a character can gain a skill—or, more rarely, an ability—that provides a short-term benefit. Let's say a character notices that the tracks they're following through the woods are similar to those they saw all the time while hunting with their pa as a kid.

They spend 2 XP and say that they have a great deal of experience with following these tracks. As a result, they're trained in actions

related to the tracks. This is just like being trained in tracking, but it applies only to these particular tracks. The skill is extremely useful in this situation, but nowhere else.

Medium-term benefits are usually story based. For example, a character can spend 2 XP while fishing on a lake and say that they have experience with fishing in lakes like these, or perhaps they spend the XP after they've been in the area for a while and say that they've picked up the feel for fishing there. Either way, from now on, they're trained in fishing in these particular lakes. This helps them now and any time they return to the area, but they're not trained in fishing everywhere.

This method allows a character to get immediate training in a skill for half the normal cost. (Normally, it costs 4 XP to become trained in a skill.) It's also a way to gain a new skill even if the PC has already gained a new skill as a step toward attaining the next tier.

In rare cases, a GM might allow a character to spend 2 XP to gain an entirely new ability—such as using a device or a special ability—for a short time, usually no longer than the course of one scenario. The player and the GM should agree on a story-based explanation for the benefit. Perhaps the ability has a specific rare requirement, such as a tool, magic item, concoction, or some kind of treatment. For example, a character who wants to explore an old mining shaft to look for an artifact spends 2 XP to cobble together a device that lets them see in the dark. This gives them the ability for a considerable length of time, but not permanently—the device might work for only eight hours. Again, the story and the logic of the situation dictate the parameters.

LONG-TERM BENEFITS

In many ways, the long-term benefits a PC can gain by spending XP are a means of integrating the mechanics of the game with the story. Players can codify things that happen to their characters by talking to the GM and spending 3 XP.

Things that a PC can acquire as a long-term benefit can be thought of as story based, and they allow the player to have some narrative control over the story. In the course of play, a player might decide that their character

One way to keep track of XP is with cards, each one representing 1 XP. That way, during a GM intrusion, the GM can hand the player two cards and remind them to keep one and give one away.



gains a friend (a contact) or builds a house (a home). Because a player spent XP, however, they should have some agency over what they've gained, and it shouldn't be easily taken away. The player should help come up with the details of the contact or the design of their home.

It's also possible to gain these benefits through events in the story, without spending XP. The new contact comes to the PC and starts the relationship. The new home is granted to them as a reward for service to a powerful or wealthy patron, or maybe the character inherits the home from a relative. However, because these came from the GM and not the player (and no XP were spent), the player has no narrative control over them and the GM makes up the details.

Long-term benefits can include the following.

Contact: The character gains a long-term NPC friend or family member of importance—someone who will help them with information, equipment, or physical

tasks. The player and GM should work out the details of the relationship.

Home: The PC acquires a full-time place to live. This can be a simple cabin in the woods, an old farmhouse on some land, a community church in town with a living space, or something else that fits the character. It should be a secure place where the PC can leave their belongings and sleep soundly. Several characters could combine their XP and purchase a home together.

Title, job, or position in the community: The PC is granted a position of importance or authority. It might come with responsibilities, prestige, and rewards, or it might be an honorary title.

Wealth: The PC comes into a considerable amount of wealth, whether it's a windfall, an inheritance, or a gift. It might be enough to buy a home or a title, but that's not really the point. The main benefit is that the PC no longer needs to worry about the cost of

Experience points should not be a goal unto themselves. Instead, they are a game mechanic to simulate how—through experience, time, toil, and so on—characters become more skilled, more able, and more powerful. Spending XP to explain a change in a character's capabilities that occurred in the course of the story, such as if the PC made a new device or learned a new skill, isn't a waste of XP—it's what XP are for.

*Speed cost for wearing armor,
page 124*

simple equipment, lodging, food, and so on. This wealth could mean a large set amount or it could bestow the ability to ignore minor costs, as decided by the player and GM.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

Progressing to the next tier involves four steps. When a PC has spent 4 XP on each of the steps, they advance to the next tier and gain all the type and focus benefits of that tier. The four steps can be purchased in any order, but each can be purchased only once per tier. In other words, a PC must buy all four steps and advance to the next tier before they can buy the same steps again.

Increasing Capabilities: You gain 4 new points to add to your stat Pools. You can allocate the points among your Pools however you wish.

Moving Toward Perfection: You add 1 to your Might Edge, your Speed Edge, or your Intellect Edge (your choice).

Extra Effort: Your Effort score increases by 1.

Skills: Choose one skill other than attacks or defense, such as climbing, jumping, persuading, or sneaking. You become trained in that skill. You can also choose to be knowledgeable in a certain area of study, such as history or geology. You can even choose a skill based on your character's special abilities. For example, if your character has an ability that lets them mentally damage an enemy, you can become trained in that ability, easing the task of using it.

If you choose a skill that you are already trained in, you become specialized in that skill, easing the task by two steps instead of one. If you choose a skill that you have an **inability** in, the training and the inability cancel each other out (you aren't eased or hindered in that task). For example, if you have an inability in perception, becoming trained in perception cancels out the inability.

Other Options: Players can also spend 4 XP to purchase other special options. Selecting one of these options counts as purchasing one of the four stages necessary to advance to the next tier. The other three need to

be from the other categories. The special options are as follows:

- Reduce the cost for wearing armor. This option lowers the **Speed cost for wearing armor** by 1.
- Add 2 to your recovery rolls.
- Select another focus ability available to you at tier 3. (You must be tier 3 or higher to do this. Characters advancing beyond tier 6 can use this option to select their other tier 6 focus ability.)
- Select another character ability from your type, such as a tier 2 Protector selecting Reload or Crushing Blow.

EQUAL ADVANCEMENT

It's worthwhile if all characters advance through the six tiers at about the same rate—an important issue for some players. A good GM can achieve this result by carefully handing out XP rewards, some during play (which will tend to get used immediately) and some after play concludes, especially after completing a major story arc or quest so the GM can hand out 4 XP in one go (which will tend to get used for advancement). Many groups will discover while playing that equal advancement isn't an important issue, but people should get to play the game the way they want to play it.

TIER ADVANCEMENT IN THE CYPHER SYSTEM

Tiers in the Cypher System aren't entirely like levels in other roleplaying games. In the Cypher System, gaining tiers is not the players' only goal or the only measure of achievement. Starting (first-tier) characters are already competent, and there are only six tiers. Character advancement has a power curve, but it's only steep enough to keep things interesting. In other words, gaining a new tier is cool and fun, but it's not the only path to success or power. If you spend all your XP on immediate, short-term, and medium-term benefits, you will be different from someone who spends their points on long-term benefits, but you will not be "behind" that character.

The general idea is that most characters will spend half their XP on tier advancement and long-term benefits, and the rest on immediate benefits and short- and medium-term benefits (which are used during gameplay). Some

Once you're specialized in a skill, you can't improve your training in that skill further (you can ease a task by up to two steps with training). You can still make that task easier with assets and a few rare abilities that don't count as an asset or training.

Inability, page 129

groups might decide that XP earned during a game is to be spent on immediate and short- and medium-term benefits (gameplay uses), and XP awarded between sessions for discoveries is to be spent on character advancement (long-term uses).

Ultimately, the idea is to make experience points into tools that the players and the GM can use to shape the story and the characters, not just a bookkeeping hassle.

SAMPLE CHARACTER ARCS

The rest of this chapter presents sample character arcs for PCs. The writeup of each arc describes the parts involved in progressing through the arc:

Opening: This sets the stage for the rest of the arc. It involves some action, although that might just be the PC agreeing to do the task or undertake the mission. It usually has no reward.

Step(s): This is the action required to move toward the climax. In story terms, this is the movement through the bulk of the arc. It's the journey. The rising tension. Although there might be just one step, there might be many, depending on the story told. Each results in a reward of 2 XP.

Climax: This is the finale—the point at which the PC likely succeeds or fails at what they've set out to do. Not every arc ends with victory. If the character is successful, they earn a reward of 4 XP. If they fail, they still earn a reward of 2 XP. If a character fails the climax, they very likely ignore the resolution.

Resolution: This is the wrap-up or denouement. It's a time for the character to reflect on what happened, tie up any loose ends, and figure out what happens next. When things are more or less resolved, the character earns a 1 XP reward.

Within the arc, most of the time a part is probably optional, depending on the situation—although it's hard to envision most arcs without some kind of opening, climax, or resolution. Steps other than the opening, the climax, and the resolution can be done in any order.

Character arcs should always take at least a few weeks in game time, and no more than two parts in an arc should be accomplished in a game session (and most of the time, it

should be one part, if any). If neither of these two things is true, it's not really a character arc. You can't, for example, use the Creation arc to guide you through something you can make in an hour or two.

The following are example character arcs that you can choose for your character. If you and the GM want to make a new one, it should be fairly easy after looking through these models.

BECOME A PARENT

You are about to become a parent. This character arc assumes you already have a plan in place to become a parent. Perhaps you have a partner or surrogate, maybe you're hoping to adopt, or maybe you're hoping to make a baby arrive by some other means.

Characters of all genders can take and complete the Become a Parent arc.

If you want your character to find a romantic partner or spouse first, you can use the **Romance** arc.

This arc is usually followed by the **Raise a Child** arc.

Opening: Get with child. Someone becomes pregnant, you start the adoption process, or you plan to become a parent through other means.

Step: Build support. This might be a doctor, family member, co-parent, community organization, midwife, doula, or similar helper. This is optional.

Step: Complication. A complication arises that threatens the pregnancy or arrival of the child; the birth parent(s), guardians, or caretakers; or both.

Step: Preparation. You prepare a place for the birth as well as a safe place for the infant to live once born.

Climax: Delivery. The baby arrives. Success means the child survives.

Resolution: You get the baby to the place you have prepared and settle in, deciding what to do next.

There is a place on your character sheet to track the steps you have taken to advance to the next tier.

Romance, page 176

Raise a Child, page 173

*This chapter has a selection of sample character arcs, but you can create your own too. The arcs are intentionally broad to encompass many different characters and stories. For example, *Revenge* is a very simple and straightforward character arc. The player who chooses this arc for their character decides who they want revenge on, and why. It's up to the players and the GM to make the details fit.*

The Inner Dark, page 188

The Green, page 188

When in doubt, if one character accomplishes a step in their arc but another character does not, the first character should get the 2 XP reward, but the other character should probably still get, at minimum, 1 XP for the session.

BUILD

You're going to build a physical structure—a house, a large boat, a store, a community center, a defensive wall, or something similar. This arc also covers renovating an existing structure or substantially adding to one.

Opening: Make a plan. This almost certainly involves literally drawing up blueprints or plans, or getting someone to do so for you.

Step(s): Find a site. This might be extremely straightforward—a simple examination of the site—or it might be an entire exploratory adventure. (If the latter, it might involve multiple steps.)

Step(s): Gather materials. Depending on what you're building and what it's made out of, this could involve multiple steps, as well as substantial costs.

Step(s): Construction. Depending on what you're building, this could involve multiple steps. It might also take a considerable amount of time and work.

Climax: Completion. The structure is finished.

Resolution: You put the structure to its desired use and see if it holds up.

CLEANSE

Someone or something has been contaminated (probably by **the Inner Dark**, **the Green**, or other magic, but also possibly by some other entity, pollution, a deadly virus, an infection, or something else) and you want to rid them of such influences or contaminants. This could also be an infection, an infestation, a curse, or something else.

Opening: Figuring out the threat. You determine the nature of the contamination.

Step: Find the solution. Almost every contamination has its own particular solution, and this likely involves research and consultation.

Step: Getting ready. The solution probably involves materials, spells, or other things that you must gather and prepare.

Climax: The cleansing. You confront the contamination.

Resolution: You reflect on the events that have transpired and what effects they might have on the future. How can you keep this from happening again?



CREATION

You want to make something that's unique to you. Maybe you dream of building a gorgeous stained glass window for the local church, writing a book about the area, creating a machine that's the first of its kind, or something else that is unique and original to you.

Opening: Make a plan. Figure out what you need, what you're going to do, and how you're going to do it.

Step(s): Gather your goods and materials. Depending on what you're creating and what it's made out of, this could involve multiple steps. There probably are substantial costs, barter, or tasks involved as well.

Step(s): Progress. Depending on what you're creating, this could involve multiple steps. It might also take a considerable amount of time and work. You might need someone to teach you or help you along the way.

Climax: Completion. It's finished! Is it what you wanted? Does it work?

Resolution: You think about what you have learned from the process and use or enjoy the fruits of your labor.

DEVELOP A BOND

You want to get closer to another character. This might be to make a friend, find a mentor, or establish a contact in a position of power. It might be to turn a friend into a much closer friend. The character might be an NPC or a PC.

Opening: Getting to know you. You learn what you can about the other character.

Step: Initial attempt. You attempt to make contact. This might involve sending messages or gifts, asking others for help, or just going up and saying hello, depending on the situation.

Step(s): Building a relationship. There might be many such steps as you develop the relationship.

Climax: Bond. You succeed or fail at forging the bond.

Resolution: You enjoy the fruits of your new relationship.

ENTERPRISE

You want to create and run a business or start an organization. Maybe everyone tells you they love your baking and you want to start selling goods. Maybe you've been an apprentice for the local carpenter for years and want to open your own woodworking shop. Or maybe you want to gather like-minded folks to start a small school or found a community center. You'll almost certainly have to make new connections, find (and pay for) a location, and deal with all manner of administrative duties.

Opening: Drawing up a plan. What's your goal, and how will you achieve it?

Step: Account for your resources. How much financing does the enterprise need compared to what you've got? If you need more, how will you get it? How many additional people do you need to start, and how many will you need once things are up and running?

Step: Finding a location. You probably need a place to run your enterprise—a store, a workshop, a base of operations, and so on. You find a location and look into what it will take to buy or rent it.

Step(s): Building the enterprise. You gather the needed equipment or personnel. You make the connections and deals to get things started. You obtain any permits or other legal documents. You test new products. You actually start the business. Each of these developments (and likely others) can be counted as a separate step, so there will be many steps.

Climax: Profit and loss. You determine whether your enterprise will take off and carry on into the future, or fall apart before it gets a chance to blossom. This occurs in a single dramatic moment—your first major client, your organization's first big meeting or mission, or whatever else is appropriate.

Resolution: A time for reflection on everything that occurred, and how you're going to move forward.

Some players might not want to use character arcs. The GM, however, can still use them as a benchmark for awarding XP. If the PCs are going off to explore an uncharted underground cave system, the GM can essentially give them the Explore arc.

The Green, page 188
Barrow family, page 196
Redemption, page 174

ESTABLISHMENT

You want to prove yourself as someone of importance. This can take many forms—socially, as part of your family, within your organization or community, financially, or romantically. Perhaps you want **the Green** or the **Barrow family** to take notice of you.

Opening: Assessment. You assess yourself as well as who you need to prove yourself to.

Step(s): Appearances and accomplishments matter. You improve your look. Enhance your wardrobe. Spruce up your house. Achieve a thing that people will take notice of. Whatever it takes to get attention from the right people. There might be many such steps.

Step(s): Self-aggrandizement. You need to get the word out to get people talking about you. There might be many such steps.

Climax: Grabbing attention. You do something big, like host a party for influential people or produce a play that you wrote. You make a big splash or a big crash.

Resolution: You reflect on what you did and where you go from here.

EXPLORE

Something out there is unknown and you want to explore its secrets. This is most likely a natural area, such as an uncharted cave system, an unexplored area of wilderness, a rumored place of magic, or something similar.

Opening: Make a plan. Not only do you draw up a plan for your exploration, but if appropriate, you also make a formal declaration to relevant parties of what you're going to do.

Step(s): Gather resources. You get the supplies, vehicles, and help you need. Depending on where you're going and what's required, this could involve multiple steps. There probably are substantial costs involved as well.

Step(s): Travel. You go where you wish to explore. There might be many such steps, depending on how long it takes to get there.

Step(s): Exploration. This is the meat of the arc, but it's probably a series of small moves and minor victories. There might be many such steps.

Climax: Conquest. You make the big discovery or truly master the area. You might not have explored every inch of the place, but if you're successful, you can claim to be done.

Resolution: You return home and possibly share your findings.

Serve the Community,
page 176

FALL FROM GRACE

This is an odd character arc in that it's (presumably) not something that a character would want. It's something that a player selects on a meta level for the character because it makes for an interesting story. It also sets up the potential for future arcs, such as **Redemption**.

It's important that this arc involves actions you take. For example, in your attempt to bring your child back to life, you make a bargain with a higher entity. In its name, you must do bad things. You endanger others and perhaps yourself. You might even agree to kill someone. In other words, the fall isn't orchestrated by someone else—it's all your own doing.

Opening: The descent. Things go bad.

Step(s): Further descent. Things get worse. Depending on the situation, this might involve many steps.

Step: Lashing out. You treat others poorly as you descend.

Climax: Rock bottom. There is no chance for success here. Only failure.

Resolution: You wallow in your own misery.

FIND YOUR FAMILY

You want to create a strong support system among your friends and fellow travelers. You seek the help of those around you to help you through difficult times, and you wish to offer it back. This connection might be to your fellow PCs, to a group of NPCs that you meet along the way, or as part of an already-established group or organization. This arc is more about building a reciprocal social support system than something like **Serve the Community**.

Opening: Let's be friends. You propose the idea of a support system to those you'd like to include.

Step: Reach out. You do the hard work of making yourself vulnerable to others by being honest and open about who you are. You create a safe space for others to do the same.

Step(s): Accept and give help. You ask for and accept help and support from the group. You give help and support to others when it's needed.

Climax: Strong bond. During a time of crisis, the group works together to support and uplift you, and you are there for them in return.

Resolution: You enjoy the benefits of having a supportive group of people in your life.

FINISH A GREAT WORK

Something that was begun in the past must now be completed. This might involve finishing the construction of a monument, fulfilling a bargain started long ago, developing the final steps of a cure, finishing your granny's family memoirs, and so on.

Opening: Assessing the past. You look at what has come before and where it still needs to go. This almost certainly involves some real research.

Step: Conceive of a plan. You outline how to move forward.

Step(s): Progress. You make significant progress or overcome a barrier to completion. This might involve multiple such steps.

Climax: Completion. This involves the big finish to the past work.

Resolution: You reflect on what you did and where you go from here.

GIVE YOUR WORD

You wish to make and fulfill a bargain. This isn't just a handshake with a neighbor. This is a bargain, a trade, a promise, or a vow made to some person or creature greater than yourself in the hope for a fairly large gain. This is likely a long-term arc.

Opening: Decide what bargain you will make and with whom you hope to make it.

Step: Initiate the deal. This likely involves finding the entity and striking the bargain.

Step(s): Holding up your end of the bargain. This is usually many steps and could involve completing a number of different tasks.

Climax: Completing your end of the bargain.

Resolution: You collect your promised reward or gain.

GROWTH

Willingly or unwillingly, you're going to change. This is another meta arc. It's less about a goal and more about character development. While it's possible that the growth involved is intentional, in most people's lives and stories, it is emergent. A character might become less selfish, braver, or a better leader, or experience some other form of growth.

Opening: The beginning. Change usually begins slowly, in a small, almost imperceptible way.

Step(s): Change. Growth involves many small steps.

Step: Overcoming an obstacle. The temptation to resort to your old ways is always present.

Climax: Self-evident change. This is a dramatic about-face. This is the moment where you do something the "old you" would never have done, and it has a profound effect on you and those around you. With either success or failure, growth is possible.

Resolution: You recognize the change in yourself and move forward.

Often the best scenarios are the ones in which the players take the initiative and are proactive about attaining a goal that they set for themselves. Whether they want to start a local community choir, make the nearby wilderness safer for the family, case and rob a rich mining family, or anything else, sometimes players should make their own adventures.



HELP YOUR NEIGHBOR

Someone needs your help. When another PC that you're friendly with takes a character arc, you can select this arc to help them with whatever their arc is (if appropriate). The steps and climax depend entirely on their chosen arc. If the friend is an NPC, the steps and climax are lifted from another arc appropriate to whatever they seek to do.

It's difficult, but possible, to aid a friend with an arc even if they're unwilling to accept (or are ignorant of) your help.

The cost and rewards for a character with this arc are the same as those described in the original character arc.

Opening: Answering the call. Offering to help (or responding to a request for help).

Step(s) and Climax: Depends on the friend's arc. Rewards are the same for you as for your friend.

Resolution: You speak with your friend and learn if they're satisfied. Together, you share what you've learned (if anything) and where you will go from here.

JOIN AN ORGANIZATION

You want to join an organization. This might be a local union, a company, a religious sect, a secretive group, or something else.

Opening: Getting the details. You learn all you can about the organization and how one becomes a member.

Step(s): Making a contact. Friends on the inside are always important.

Step(s): Performing a deed. The organization might want to test your worth, or this might be a ceremony you must take part in. It might include paying some sort of dues or fee. Or all of these things.

Climax: Proving your worth. This is the point at which you attempt to show the organization that they would be better off with you as a member.

Resolution: You consider your efforts and assess what your membership gets you.

JUSTICE

You try to right a wrong or bring a wrongdoer to justice.

Opening: Declaration. You publicly declare that you will bring justice in this situation. This is optional.

Step(s): Tracking the guilty. You track down the guilty party, assuming there is one. This might not be physically finding them if you already know where they are. Instead, it might be discovering a way to get at them if they are distant, difficult to reach, or well protected. This step might be repeated multiple times, if applicable.

Step: Helping the victim. Righting a wrong does not always involve confronting a wrongdoer. Part of it might be about helping those who were wronged.

Climax: Confrontation. You confront the guilty party. This might be a public accusation and demonstration of guilt, a trial, or an attack to kill, wound, or apprehend them—whatever you choose to be appropriate.

Resolution: You resolve the outcome and ramifications of the confrontation and decide what to do next.

LEARN

You want to learn something. This isn't the same as the *Uncover a Secret* arc, in which you're looking for a bit of information. This is a skill or whole area of knowledge you want to gain proficiency with. This is learning how to play an instrument, cook amazing dishes with ease and speed, speak a new language, and so on. Thus, it's not about gaining a skill in playing an instrument, but learning to be an experienced player.

Opening: Focusing on the problem.

Step: Finding a teacher or a way to teach yourself, and getting any supplies you need. Now you can truly begin.

Step(s): Learn. Depending on what you're learning, this could involve one step or quite a few.

Climax: The test. You put your new knowledge to the test in a real situation.

Resolution: You relax a bit and decide what to do next.

Uncover a Secret, page 178

MASTER A SKILL

You're skilled, but you want to become the best. This arc might logically follow the Learn arc. As with the Learn arc, this can involve any kind of training at all, not just a skill.

Opening: Finding the path. You've learned the basics. Now it's time for the advanced material.

Step: Discovering a master. You find a master to help you become a master. You might also need to find better materials.

Step(s): Learn. Depending on what you're mastering, this could involve one step or quite a few.

Step: The last step. Eventually, you realize that even a master cannot teach you the last step. You must learn it on your own.

Climax: The test. You put your mastery to the test in a real situation—and considering your goal, it's probably a very important situation.

Resolution: You relax a bit and decide what to do next.

MYSTERIOUS BACKGROUND

You want to know where you come from—there's some kind of mystery in your past. The mystery likely has to do with your biological family (Who were your parents? What really happened to your grandmother whose name you bear?), but it could be something else.

Opening: Beginning the search.

Step: Research. You look into your family background, if possible.

Step(s): Investigation. You talk to people who might know. You follow clues.

Climax: Discovery. You discover the secret of your background. You can decide if what you learn is good or bad, but either way, discovery means success.

Resolution: You contemplate how this new knowledge sits with you.

NEW DISCOVERY

You want to invent a new machine, magical process, or something similar. A cure for a newly discovered disease? A better way to get ore out of the ground? A new musical instrument that has unique powers to dispel magic? Any of these and more could be your discovery. While similar to the *Creation* arc and the Learn arc, the New Discovery

arc involves blazing a new trail. No one can teach you what you want to know. You've got to do it on your own.

Opening: The idea. You draw up plans for the thing you want to invent or discover.

Step: Research. You learn what people have done before and recognize where they fell short.

Step(s): Trial and error. You test your hypothesis. This often ends in many failures before you get a success.

Climax: Eureka! It's time to put the discovery to the true test.

Resolution: You reflect on your discovery and probably compile your notes and write it all down, for posterity's sake if nothing else.

RAISE A CHILD

You raise a child to adulthood. It can be your biological child or one you adopt. It can even be a child taken under your wing, more a young protégé than a biological child. This is obviously a very long-term arc.

Opening: Sharing your home. The child now lives with you.

Step: Care and feeding. You learn to meet the child's basic needs.

Step(s): Basic instruction. You teach them to walk, talk, and read. You teach them to care for themselves.

Step(s): The rewards are many. The child loves you. Relies on you. Trusts you. Eventually, helps you.

Step(s): Ethical instruction. You instill your basic ethics in the child, hoping that they will mature into an adult you can be proud of.

Climax: Adulthood. At some point the child leaves the proverbial nest. You determine, at this point, your own success or failure.

Resolution: You reflect on the memories you have made.

Creation, page 169



GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Well, now. I've had poisoned pies, boxes of roaches, and all manner of nastiness left on my doorstep, but this is a first.

NINA: What is it, Mama?

As Miz Marigold kneels down and carefully lifts the swaddled bundle up from the basket, Nina Jennings hears the unmistakable sound of a baby's curious babbling. Surprised, she peers over her mama's shoulder.

NINA: Oh sweet Jesus! Is that—?

GRANNY UNDERWOOD: Mhmm. Somebody's dumped a little white boy on our doorstep.

—Season 3, Episode 34:
On Oak Mountain

RECOVER FROM A WOUND (OR TRAUMA)

You need to heal. This isn't just for healing simple damage. This involves recovering from a major debilitating injury, illness, or shock. Severe damage, the loss of a body part, and emotional trauma all fall into this category.

Opening: Rest. The first thing you need to do is rest.

Step: Self-care. You take care of your own needs.

Step: Getting aid. Someone helps.

Step: Medicine. Some kind of drug, cure, magic, poultice, potion, or remedy aids your recovery.

Step: Therapy. With the help of someone else, you exercise your injury or cope with your trauma.

Climax: Acceptance or recovery. You try to move on and use what has been damaged (or learn how to function without it).

Resolution: You get on with your life.

REDEMPTION

You've done something very wrong, but you want to atone and make it right again. This is similar to the **Justice** arc or the **Right a Wrong** arc, except you are the wrongdoer. This could be a follow-up to the **Fall From Grace** arc.

Opening: Regret. You are determined to rebuild, recover, and restore.

Step: Forgiveness. You apologize and ask for forgiveness.

Step: Identifying the needs. You determine what needs to be done to atone for your transgression.

Climax: Making good. You perform an act that you hope will redeem your past misdeed.

Resolution: You reflect on what has happened and look to the future.

REDRESS

Someone close to you or important to you has been wronged. The most overt version of this arc would be to avenge someone's death. Redress is different from something like revenge, as revenge is personal—you are the wronged party. But in the Redress character arc, you're avenging a wrong done to someone else.

Opening: Declaration. You publicly declare that you will avenge the victim(s). This is optional.

Step(s): Tracking the guilty. You track down the guilty party. This might not be physically finding them if you already know where they are. Instead, it might be discovering a way to get at them if they are distant, difficult to reach, or well protected. This step might be repeated multiple times, if applicable.

Step: Finding the guilty. You finally find the guilty party, or find a path or make a plan to reach them. Now all that's left is to confront them.

Climax: Confrontation. You confront the guilty party. This might be a public accusation and demonstration of guilt, a trial, or an attack to kill, wound, or apprehend them—whatever you feel is appropriate.

Resolution: You resolve the outcome and the ramifications of the confrontation and decide what to do next.

REPAY A DEBT

You owe someone something, and it's time to make good. While this might be about money, it's more likely something else, such as holding up your end of a bargain or making good on a promise.

Opening: Debts come due. You determine to do what is needed to make good on the debt. It might involve repaying money, but more appropriately it's performing a deed or a series of deeds.

Step: Talking it over. You discuss the matter with the person you owe, if possible. You ensure that what you're doing is what they want.

Climax: Repayment. Either you do something to earn the money or goods you owe, or you undertake a major task that will compensate the other person.

Resolution: You relax knowing that your debt is repaid, and you look to the future.

RESCUE

Someone or something of great importance has been taken, and you want to get them or it back.

Opening: Heeding the call. You determine what has happened, and who or what is missing.



Justice, page 172

Fall From Grace, page 170

Step: Tracking. You discover who has taken them, possibly why, and ideally where.

Step: Travel. You go to where they're being held and get information on the location and who is involved. Maybe make a plan.

Climax: Rescue operation. You go in and get them.

Resolution: You return them home.

RESTORATION

You're down but not out. You want to restore your good name. Recover what you've lost. Rebuild what has been destroyed. You've fallen down or have been knocked down, but either way, you want to pick yourself up. This is a possible follow-up to the Fall From Grace arc.

Opening: Vow to yourself. You are determined to rebuild, recover, and restore.

Step(s): Work. You rebuild, recover, and restore. If all your money was stolen, you make more. If your house was destroyed, you rebuild it. If your reputation was tarnished, you perform deeds that restore your good name.

Climax: The final act. You undertake one last major task that will bring things back to where they were (or close to it). A lot is riding on this moment.

Resolution: You enjoy a return to things the way they were before.

REVENGE

Someone did something that harmed you. Unlike the Redress arc, this arc probably isn't about tracking down a murderer, but it might involve pursuing someone who stole from you, hurt you, or otherwise brought you grief. The key is that it's personal. Otherwise, use the *Justice* arc.

Opening: Vow. You swear revenge.

Step(s): Finding a clue. You find a clue to tracking down the culprit.

Climax: Confrontation. You confront the culprit.

Resolution: You deal with the aftermath of the confrontation and move on. You think about whether you are satisfied by gaining your revenge.

RIGHT A WRONG

Someone or something did something horrible, and its ramifications are still felt, even if it happened long ago. You seek to undo the damage, or at least stop it from continuing.

This is different from the *Justice* arc because this isn't about justice (or even revenge). It's about literally undoing something bad that happened in the past, such as a purposeful mine explosion, an entire community or family being destroyed by creatures or weather, people and animals being driven from their land by greed, and so on.

Opening: Vowing to put right what once went wrong.

Step: Make a plan. You learn all you can about the situation and then make a plan to put things right.

Step(s): Progress. This is an active step toward undoing the wrong. It might involve finding something, defeating someone, destroying something, building something, or almost anything else, depending on the circumstances.

Climax: Change. You face the challenge of the former wrong, and either overcome it or fail.

Resolution: You reflect on what you've accomplished and think about the future.



That ole pastor might have thought Tom was already dead, but that weren't quite true. Not yet. And as he lay there bleeding and dying, every nerve burning with all the fires of hell, Tom figured he'd been punished quite enough for any soul, and he swore revenge, if not on Eleanor's husband, then on a world that would allow such things to happen. And three days later, Tom rose, and began his long and bloody campaign of vengeance on the hills of East Tennessee.

—Date Night: A Tale for the Season

Justice, page 172

ROMANCE

You want to create a relationship with a romantic partner or partners. Perhaps you have a specific someone in mind, or maybe you're just interested in a relationship in general.

Opening(s): Caught someone's eye. You meet someone you're interested in. (Since this can be short-lived, it's possible to have this opening occur more than once.)

Step(s): Courtship. You begin seeing the person or people regularly. Although not every "date" is a step in the arc, significant moments are, and there may be a few of them.

Climax: Commitment. You might or might not be interested in a monogamous relationship. Regardless, you and your love(s) have made some kind of commitment to each other.

Resolution: You think about the future. Marriage? Children? Exploring the world together? These are only some of the possibilities.

SAFEGUARD

A person, place, or thing is threatened, and you want to protect it. Perhaps it's your community or family, maybe it's a sacred spot, or maybe it's a way of life.

Opening: Analyze the situation. What are you defending, and what's threatening it?

Step: Account for your resources and make a plan. How are you going to defend it? Do you need to make things, gather allies and resources, learn new skills, or perhaps all of the above?

Step(s): Fend off the initial danger. This likely consists of multiple steps, since those threatening what you're protecting will probably make several minor threats, attacks, or attempts that you'll have to defeat.

Climax: Protect. The true threat reveals itself and you confront it.

Resolution: You reflect on everything that occurred, and assess the person, place, or thing's safety going forward.

SERVE THE COMMUNITY

You set out to accomplish something that will further an organization, community, or collective. It could be a large or established group such as the local church, a community theater group, an orphanage, or the union, or it might be a startup or smaller organization that could use your help. You're probably

allied with them, or they are rewarding you for your help in some fashion.

Opening: Responding to the call. You work out all the details of what's expected of you, and what rewards (if any) you might get. You also get the specifics of what's required to join and advance.

Step: Sizing up the task. This requires some action. Asking around to various folks. Sneaking in somewhere to get the information you need. Visiting the mayor or other person with authority.

Step(s): Undertaking the task. Because this arc can vary so widely based on the task involved, there might be multiple steps like this one.

Climax: Completing the task.

Resolution: Collecting your reward (if any) and conferring with the people in the organization or community. Perhaps getting access to higher-ranking people in the organization. You can choose to have your connection to the organization increase rather than take the standard reward.

SOLVE A MYSTERY

Different from the **Learn** arc and the **Uncover a Secret** arc, this arc is about solving a crime or a similar action committed in the fairly recent past. It's not about practice or study, but about questions and answers. The mystery doesn't have to be a crime. It might be "What is making those strange noises in the woods at night?"

Opening: Pledging to solve the mystery.

Step: Research. You get some background.

Step(s): Investigation. You ask questions. You look for clues. You cast divinations. This likely encompasses many such steps.

Climax: Discovery. You come upon what you believe to be the solution to the mystery.

Resolution: In this step, which is far more active than most resolutions, you confront the people involved in the mystery with what you've discovered, or you use the information in some way (such as taking it to the proper authorities).

Learn, page 172

Uncover a Secret, page 178



TEACH

You instruct a pupil. You have knowledge on a topic and are willing to share. This can be a skill, an area of lore, a combat style, or the use of a special ability. This is usually a fairly long-term arc. Sometimes teaching a pupil is a side matter, and sometimes the pupil takes on more of an apprentice role and spends a great deal of time with you, traveling with you and perhaps even living in your home (or you living in theirs).

Opening: Taking on the student.

Step: Getting to know them. You assess your pupil's strengths and weaknesses and try to get an idea of what they need to learn and how you can teach it to them.

Step(s): The lessons. Teaching is often a slow, gradual process.

Step: Breakdown. Many times, a student needs to have a moment of crisis to really learn something. Maybe they get dejected, or maybe they rebel against your teaching techniques.

Climax: Graduation. This is when you recognize that the pupil has learned what they need. It usually comes at a dramatic moment.

Resolution: You and the pupil say your goodbyes (or decide to continue on together in a more equal capacity), and you look toward the future.

THEFT

Someone else has something you want or need. It might be something material—money or an artifact—or it might be knowledge, information, plans, or even a person.

Opening: Setting your sights. You make a plan.

Step: Casing the joint. You scout out the location of the thing (or learn its location).

Step(s): Getting to the object. Sometimes, many steps are involved before you reach the object. For example, if, in order to steal something from a union office, you need to approach one of the guards while they're off duty and bribe them to look the other way when you break in, that's covered in this step.

Climax: The attempt. You steal the object.

Resolution: You decide what to do with the thing you've stolen and contemplate the repercussions you might face for stealing it.

GMs and players should work together to make XP awards and expenditures fit the ongoing story. If a PC stays in a location for two months to learn the inhabitants' unique language, the GM might award the character a few XP, which are then immediately spent to grant them the ability to understand and speak that language.

If you want to make some kind of bargain with a creature, consider taking the Give Your Word arc (page 171) instead.

Rough and Rowdy, page 257

Witch Queen, page 384

TRAIN A CREATURE

You want to domesticate and train an animal or other creature. While the beast doesn't need to be wild, it must not already be domesticated and trained.

Opening: Getting acquainted. You get to know the creature a bit, and it gets to know you.

Step: Research. You get information on the type of creature or advice from others who have trained one.

Step: Domestication. After some work, the creature is no longer a threat to you or anyone else, and it can live peacefully in your home or wherever you wish.

Step(s): Training. Each time you use this step, you teach the creature a new, significant command that it will obey regularly and immediately.

Climax: Completion. Believing the creature's training to be complete, you put it in a situation where that is put to the test.

Resolution: You reflect on the experience.

UNCOVER A SECRET

There is knowledge out there that you want. It could be an attempt to find and learn a specific special ability. This could also be a hunt for a lost password, a key that will open a sealed door, the true name of a powerful entity, the hidden background of an influential person, or a well-guarded magical working.

Opening: Naming the secret. You give your goal a name. "I am seeking information about the origin of the **Witch Queen**."

Step(s): Research. You scour libraries, diaries, bibles, and old tomes for clues and information.

Step(s): Investigation. You talk to people to gain clues and information.

Step(s): Tracking. You track down the source of the secret information and travel to it.

Climax: Revelation. You find and attempt to use the secret, whatever that entails.

Resolution: You contemplate how this secret affects you and the world.

WHOOOP YOUR ENEMY

Someone stands in your way or is threatening you. You must overcome the challenge they represent and defeat them. "Defeat" doesn't always mean kill or even fight. Defeating a foe could mean beating them in a **Rough and Rowdy**, winning over them in an election or important job opportunity, or outsmarting them to get what you want.

Opening: Sizing up the competition. This requires some action. An investigation. An undercover mission to watch your foe in action. Making friends with your foe's other enemies or friends to learn what's what.

Step: Investigation. This requires some action, probably similar to those above.

Step(s): Diving in. You travel toward your opponent, defeat their protectors, or take steps to reach them so you can confront them. This step can take many forms, and there might be more than one such step. This step is always active.

Climax: Confrontation. The contest, challenge, fight, or confrontation occurs.

Resolution: You reflect on what you've learned and what the consequences of your actions might be.



And then he began to recount for them his encounter with the big black dog in the woods. Although it was hard to credit some of the details—the glowing red eyes and so on—the boy's story was disquieting. A feral dog—or worse, a rabid one—could pose a serious threat to the community. Children, livestock—hell, even grown men and women could be seriously hurt or even killed. If Kyle was right and the dog had already hurt a child... well, it was best not to think about that until they found more proof. It was far more likely that what Kyle had seen was the slender curve of a deer leg some careless hunter had left lying about after field dressing the carcass. Wild animals could be mighty jealous of such scavenged prizes, which would account for its aggression. Something would have to be done.

—Black Mouthed Dog, Episode Three: Down by the Bottom

Part 4: THE DARKEST MOUNTAINS IN THE WORLD



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Chapter 10:

GETTING TO KNOW APPALACHIA

The chapter is a good resource for both the GM and the players as you begin to explore Appalachia and discover more about the people who call it home and their way of life.



Millions of years ago, part of the land we now call Appalachia was home to a shallow, inland saltwater sea. Time passed, continents drifted, mountains rose, and those waters formed veins of sodium chloride like ribbons of snow through the stones of the mountains, and carved deep salt caverns out of the earth below. In part of what we now know as Virginia, some of the remaining waters formed a natural salt marsh, a fertile valley that attracted wildlife of all kinds—living and breeding, bleeding and dying, their bones and blood feeding the marsh and the mountains and nurturing the things that slept beneath those mountains, undisturbed for eons.

—Salt of the Earth: A Tale for the Season

Appalachia has a complicated history and a captivating culture. This chapter provides a wide variety of information about the Appalachian region in the early twentieth century, from a bit about its history and settlers to its terrain, seasons, and inhabitants. Much of this chapter deals with the mundane—what the terrain and weather are like, what stores you might find in a typical town, how PCs travel, and so forth. And there is, of course, a section on Appalachian magic.

Appalachia encompasses the remote mountainous parts of six of the United States: Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. Isolated communities in the mountains of these states sprung up in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, created and occupied by primarily European immigrants, who by necessity had to be independent and self-sufficient to survive and rough out an existence in the hills and hollers. Even

though the area is vast and the settlers are diverse, they are united in their shared experience of homesteading, self-reliance, supporting their neighbors, hardiness, fortitude, and their insular existence.

Old Gods of Appalachia is set in an alternate or shadow Appalachia, primarily during the early nineteenth century. While the setting is based on the Appalachia that existed during that time, there are many differences. The names of towns and counties may be altered. Places have gotten up and walked across the map. Mountains have risen and hollers have hidden themselves and been forgotten. Historical events slide forward or backward in time. And that, of course, is before we even get to the magic.



A BRIEF HISTORY

For all of its abundant natural beauty, Appalachia's history runs with blood.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Appalachia was home to people of the Shawnee, Cherokee, Iroquois, and Powhatan nations. But by the mid-1700s, as more Europeans sought their own versions of freedom in the “new land,” the original inhabitants were driven away or slaughtered. The European immigrants pushed, clawed, claimed, and massacred their way from the Atlantic coastline to the Appalachian Mountains, crawling deeper and deeper into the hills. Trekking through the marshlands and woods, looking for the perfect piece of land to call home.

By the early 1900s, the area was primarily populated by folks of English, Scots-Irish, German, French, and Spanish descent, who found the hills and hollers of Appalachia to be comfortably reminiscent of their ancestral homelands. It was also home to people of color and Native Americans who managed to eke out an existence despite the racism they encountered, some eventually becoming prominent members of the community.

Appalachia's history follows real history rather closely, and the podcast creators don't shy away from its horrors. The killing of Native Americans, the stealing of their land and renegeing on treaties, the lynching of Black people, racial segregation and hate—much of it is there. These are traumatic topics and should be treated with respect and care. The GM and players should work together to decide what topics are part of their game. We suggest using the Consent Checklist (page 411) to agree on which topics to include or leave out of your game.



The history of nation-states—of humanity itself—is written in oceans of blood. We are capable of generosity, of kindness and the nobility of sacrifice . . . in very small groups. Once men begin to organize or develop a hierarchy of any sort, the clock starts ticking, and you can start laying bets on just how long it'll take before the lust for power takes hold. Somebody always gets greedy, and it never ends well.

—Salt of the Earth:
A Tale for the Season

TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

1700s

- 1756 Daughter Dooley is born
- 1765 Daughter Dooley and her mothers come to the Colonies (Episode 0.5)
- 1779 Daughter Dooley meets Hornèd Head (Episode 0.5)
- 1794 Last Harbor (Episode 10)

1800s

- Early 1800s Barrow, PA established
- 1801 First binding of the Dead Queen
- 1821 Daughter Dooley is in Yellow Oak (Episode 6)
- 1848 Glory Ann Boggs (née Teasley) is born ("Build Mama a Coffin," Patreon exclusive)
- 1860 Sheila Walker is born
- 1864 Glory Ann Teasley, her siblings Verna and Kyle, and Waylon Boggs encounter the Black Mouthed Dog ("Black Mouthed Dog," Patreon exclusive)
- 1875 Priscilla Rose Walker is born
- 1881 Jerry Brotherton meets The Railroad Man (Episode 22)
- 1883 Carole Ann Walker (later Avery) is born
- 1884 Agnes Persephone Walker (later Norris) is born
- 1886 Marcia Lynn Walker is born
- 1890 Rebecca Victoria Walker (later Powers) is born
- 1892 Héloïse Jane (Ellie) Walker is born
- 1895 Douglass Lillian Walker is born

1900s

- 1902 The Clutch is established near what will become Baker's Gap ("The Wolf Sisters")
- 1905 Waylon Boggs departs Boggs Holler ("Build Mama a Coffin," Patreon exclusive)
- 1907 Sarah Avery is born
- 1907 Sheila Walker dies
- 1909 Jerry Brotherton retires to Baker's Gap (Episode 24)
- 1910 Cletus Garvin makes a deal (Episode 3)
- 1911 Delia Hubbard is born
- 1913 The Incident with the Railroad Man and the Local Magistrate (Episodes 23-25)

- 1917 Events of "The Wolf Sisters"
- 1917 Barlo mining disaster (Episodes 1-5, 7 & 8)
- 1917 Sarah Avery meets Elder Henry (Episode 9)
- 1922 Events of "Holiest Days of Bone and Shadow," ch. 1
- 1924 Events of "Salt of the Earth"
- 1926 The Gibson family moves to Craw, TN
- 1927 Craw, Tennessee falls
- 1927 Events unfold for Cowboy and friends on Death Island and in Baker's Gap (Episodes 14-17)
- 1927 Events of "Springtime in Boggs Holler"
- 1927 Cora Lee Tilley is invited to visit Good Mother Ministries (Episode 20)
- 1927 Events of "Build Mama a Coffin" (Patreon exclusive)
- 1927 J.T. Fields (Jack) briefly returns to Dorchester before moving on to Paradise, TN / VA
- 1927 The Tilleys encounter the Dead Queen (Episodes 18, 19, 21)
- 1928 Tommy Adkins and Ginny Estep come to Paradise, TN / VA (Episodes 26-28)
- 1928 The Dead Queen is confronted (Episodes 29 & 30)
- 1928 Events of "Holiest Days of Bone and Shadow," ch. 2
- 1930 Events of episodes 32-40
- 1932 Miss Lavinia is bound ("The Door Under the Floor," Patreon exclusive)
- 1935 Events of "Holiest Days of Bone and Shadow," ch. 3
- 1935 Events of episodes 44-45
- 1935 Events of episodes 41-42
- 1935/36 Events of episode 43
- 1941 Events of episodes 46-50
- 1975 Events of "Bumper Crop"
- 1983 Events of "School Spirit"
- 1992 Events of "The Door Under the Floor" (Patreon exclusive)
- 1993 Events discussed in the latter half of "Date Night"

THE LAND

The measurements of Appalachia's mountain ranges are modest, with no real remarkable elevations, but the mountains themselves are far from unremarkable, being among the oldest formations on Earth.

The movement of the earth (or perhaps it is the movement of Those Who Sleep Beneath) over great passages of time has built up, crumbled, pitched, and heaved these mountains, bringing shale, sandstone, limestone, and coal beds closer to the surface, perhaps to entice the most recent inhabitants to dig as far as they dare into the earth to mine its valuable resources.

The land varies between long, broad ridges with grassy and treed slopes to deep gorges with rocky slopes and caverns. Between the ridges are gorges, valleys, marshlands, and small, sheltered valleys called hollers.

A holler has a head, a mouth, and often a creek, even if it's only seasonal. The mouth is the least remote and typically broadest part of the holler, being its start; it's also typically where the holler's creek—if it has one—joins a larger creek or stream. The head is the most remote part of the holler, nestled near where the ridges meet. Houses are situated along the slopes of occupied hollers, with a road in the middle, running roughly parallel to the water source.

The folks who live in a holler almost certainly are acquaintances (perhaps they're even related). They might or might not be friends. One thing you can be sure of, though: they have each other's backs in times of crisis.

WEATHER

The area experiences all four seasons. The Appalachian area of Pennsylvania has a humid continental climate. The Appalachian areas of Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and North Carolina have a humid subtropical climate. For the purposes of your game, this means that Pennsylvania has colder temperatures in the winter than other parts of Appalachia do, with the temperatures in Pennsylvania being at or below freezing for at least a month.

In the winter, the steadfast greens of firs and spruces assure all that spring will come. The more northerly parts of Appalachia



The changing of the seasons in Appalachia is a curious and temperamental time that cares not for the comfort of mortal men. On occasion, autumn will subtly slip into the mountains of southwestern Virginia, maybe do a slow dance with summer as the warmer nights are nudged out the door against a tapestry of turning leaves and cooler mornings. Other times, she swoops through the door on a cloud of rain and cold that seeps into your bones and rattles your lungs with every breath. In these mountains, seasons do not apologize.

—Season 3, Episode 44:
A Brace of Kinsmen

typically are colder and get more snow in the winter. Snow and sleet are not uncommon for the entire area, and when large snowstorms happen, they are memorable.

Spring bursts onto the scene with the flowering of the dogwoods and the chorus of the spring peepers (frogs). Springs are rainy, with occasional thunderstorms, and full of signs of new life, from the welcome sight of budding trees to the appearance of baby animals.

Summers are typically hot and humid, with intermittent thunderstorms. The hillsides are covered with the greens of beech and oak

The Great Smoky Mountains, the part of Appalachia along the Tennessee–North Carolina border, gets its name from the ever-present morning fog.

A small piece of marshland adjacent to a river or creek is referred to as bottom land or just a bottom. Bottom land is marshy and may be prone to flooding. But flat terrain is rare and valuable in this region, so bottoms see use nonetheless. They are often pockmarked with holes filled partially with creek water, which make great homes for crawdads.



Fall, rich with rot and the sodden burn of flame-kissed leaves, twilights of misting rain and fair nights that leave everything soft. Winters that will reach into your joints and teach us what gettin' old is all about. Spring and eventually summer—months of stinging flies and nights of opened-windowed dreaming, the only condition of the air being blanket-like.

—Season 1, Episode 1:
The Path to the World of Men



Grandfather's Fall Color Ramble takes place each year at Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina. It's a series of guided walks along rambling trails to view the mountain's beautiful fall foliage.

*If you're interested in incorporating ways to combat natural, man-made, or supernatural mega-challenges in your games, check out *First Responders*, a supplement for the Cypher System.*

trees. The hot, sticky air clings to everything, but it does little to dampen the buzzing of the cicadas during the day and the hum of the katydids at night.

Autumns in Appalachia are spectacular and full of color as the deciduous trees turn from green to bold reds, oranges, and purples. The blazing foliage is a sight to behold. And the cooler air in the mornings and evenings is a welcome respite from the blazing heat of summer.

WEATHER-RELATED DISASTERS

FLOODING

There's no denying that spring in Appalachia is often beautiful. But don't let its beauty lure you into a false trust. It can also be deadly when conditions are right for a flood. If temperatures dip down close to freezing in the late spring, when the weather has already turned rainy, and that rain turns to snow, the creeks and rivers—perhaps already full to bursting with spring rain—now have

to contend with the snowmelt. A subsequent sharp increase in temperature that melts the snow quickly brings with it the likelihood of a flash flood. A great quantity of water coupled with momentum will go where it pleases, often moving or taking with it everything it crashes into.

Flooding has many beginnings—snowmelt, prolonged rainfall, the bursting of a dam—but only one end for the unprepared, which is devastation. Some of which is immediately apparent, like loss of life or livestock, and damage to property or crops. Other impacts are less conspicuous but no less overwhelming, like contaminated sources of water and the illness caused by waterborne diseases, such as cholera, giardia, and dysentery.

Many floods happen over a matter of days and allow some time for preparation and mitigation, such as moving families and livestock to higher ground and sandbagging around structures. Flash floods happen very quickly (generally less than six hours) and leave little to no time for preparations other than evacuating to safety.



LANDSLIDE

When very unstable ground is full to bursting of water, the conditions are just right for a landslide or mudslide. Human action, such as mass logging or any activity that removes soil and vegetation on a large scale, can also trigger or contribute to a landslide.

Like a flash flood, a landslide happens quickly and is devastating. An entire piece of land sloughs off and almost flows like water, burying everything in its path. The only thing to do is get out of the way.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The sounds of creeks and critters in Appalachia are almost always present, no matter the season. From late spring through mid-autumn, the woods are thick and dark with deciduous trees, evergreens, shrubs, thorny bushes, and loads of critters. In the late autumn and winter, when the deciduous trees have gone bare and many

small creatures like mice and insects are hibernating, the bright red of foraging cardinals is a frequent sight, as is hearing the chittering of squirrels.

Appalachians make ample use of the flora and fauna: hunting, fishing, farming, and preserving. Popular game animals are white-tailed deer, rabbit, squirrel, and wild turkey, but any animal with fur or feathers or even scales will do in a pinch. Popular fish are bass, trout, and pike. The freshwater streams also provide crawdads, which are delicious in a stew.

The Appalachians of the early twentieth century had plenty of variety in their vegetable gardens. Their forefathers took advantage of and further cultivated already existing plants, such as corn, beans, tomatoes, peppers, and squash, and also brought their own seeds, introducing potatoes, peas, carrots, celery, onions, and more to the region.

Strip mining, also called surface mining, contributes to landslides in Appalachia, but this type of mining isn't widespread until the mid-twentieth century.

You can play a character who was born anywhere in the world, including the Appalachian region.

Housekeeping in Old Virginia, compiled by Marion Cabell Tyree, was published in 1878 and includes recipes for everything from making bread to barbecuing squirrel, plus instructions for preserving food, remedies for illnesses, and best housekeeping practices. Recipe books like this are very common in homes; they often have lots of writing in the margins and additional recipes added to them. This book and many others can be accessed for free through the Project Gutenberg website.

LIVING IN APPALACHIA

The inhabitants of alternate Appalachia are culturally and racially diverse. It's a melting pot inside the great American melting pot, so to speak, where independent family groups bond together to form tight-knit communities situated around areas with good natural resources. It's a life centered on community, filled with hard work and even harder play.

Appalachians consider themselves hardy, self-sufficient folk—the salt of the earth. But like any group of people, they're full of seemingly contradictory characteristics. Helpful to anyone in need, but wary and mistrusting of strangers, especially new members of the community. Loyal to family and friends, but possibly unreliable to outsiders.

The typical inhabitant is familiar with Christian observances. Most folks know of a granny witch and may even have one in their family. Nonmagical folk believe that granny witches mix spirituality and mysticism with their knowledge of plants, roots, and herbs to create their special blend of magic.

On the very rural home front, folks have to provide for their own needs: food, water, clothing, and shelter. They plant, tend, harvest, and preserve vegetables and fruits. They draw water from a nearby stream or dig a well. They hunt and fish, and keep a few livestock animals. They likely raise cows, chickens, sheep, and hogs, providing milk, butter, eggs, and meat. Cloth is purchased, bartered for, or made by spinning cotton or wool. It's used first for clothing, which is passed down from family member to family member until it's worn thin, and then it's repurposed as quilting squares or rags. The family home probably starts as a small one-room cabin and expands as they're able to add on to it. Each member of the family who is able contributes to their survival, and everything is used until it can be used no more.

The more urban areas of Appalachia are no less family-centric but have access to a greater variety of grocers and retail stores, so they're less self-reliant than the more isolated Appalachians.



Most towns at least have a U.S. Post Office, grocery or general store (perhaps both), school, church (possibly more than one), town hall, jail, drugstore, doctor's office (could be a room in the doctor's residence), barbershop, gas station, hardware store, and bus stop (for regional travel). Power stations are typically part of countywide networks that serve many municipalities.

In addition to all that is found in a small town, large towns and small cities likely have a hospital, volunteer fire station, newspaper office, train station, hotel, restaurant, cinema, jewelry store, and more. Dance halls are found in some areas, but not in others. As a matter of fact, dancing is banned in some places.

HOME SWEET HOME

Dwellings vary in age, size, and style, from rural homesteads that have been in the same family since they were crafted to newly constructed company housing in mining towns to boardinghouses with rooms to let.

In a company town, the company owns practically everything from the stores to the homes to the people through employment. Miners and their families often occupy company housing, a group of identical houses constructed and owned by a mining company. Some mining companies provide housing and utilities to their workers but pay a very small salary. Others provide housing, but not utilities, and pay the miners a combination of salary and scrip, or scrip alone.

Most homes in towns have electricity, running water, and indoor toilets, though outhouses are not rare. Radios are common, as are washing machines, iceboxes, and electric sweepers. Homes in more isolated rural areas likely have electricity, which, in addition to powering lights, also powers an electric well pump, giving them indoor running water. Outhouses are more common in rural areas, being an efficient and clean method of waste disposal.

Whether it's a timeworn homestead or a company house, one common factor with almost all Appalachian dwellings is the basement, a room-sized (or larger) space dug into the ground beneath a dwelling that provides natural cooling and insulating for storing root vegetables and home-canned

goods. A basement is usually roughly finished, with a concrete floor and perhaps cinder block walls. It's a good general storage area, especially for anything you want to keep hidden from your neighbors.

APPALACHIAN MAGIC

Appalachian magic is unique—not just in and of itself, but in the way it varies from town to town, from family to family, and even from one individual to another. Much of this is due to its origin. Some of it was brought by the Irish and Scottish families that came to the region, and much of it comes from the First Peoples who populated the area long before the others.

And, of course, as magic gets passed down over the years, it changes and evolves, as new materials and objects are available, different creatures and tales come into being, and more peoples and cultures move into the area.

Appalachian magic is practical, down to earth, and sympathetic in nature. It uses what's available around the house, the farm, the local store, and the woods. So you're more likely to find items like river rocks, lightning-split wood, herbs, grave dirt, fabric and needles, nails, animal blood, eggs, and salt in spells than you are to find incense, crystals, dragon's blood, and other "magic ingredients."

GRANNY MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

Most magic in the region is considered "granny magic," "workings," witchcraft, or folk magic. This includes songs, spells, rituals, and charms created specifically to heal or harm, bring good luck (or bad), increase fertility or the harvest, dowse for wells, and work with spirits of the dead.

Rites are typically passed down by family members or created by the practitioner, based on what type of working they're doing and what they're trying to achieve.

What Appalachian magic isn't:

- Ritual clothing
- Pentacles
- Formal rites (although there are any number of informal rites)
- Crystals (other than mountain quartz, which is local)
- Wands (except for dowsing rods)

Scrip is often issued by mining companies in lieu of cash on payday, typically in the form of a coin minted by the company. It's for use only at company-owned organizations, such as a general goods store.

Electric washing machines have a motor that powers the agitation of water, clothing, and detergent together. There is a motor-driven wringer into which wet items are fed to wring moisture from them. The clothes are then hung on a line to dry.

Canning is a method of processing and preserving food in airtight containers, typically glass Mason jars, keeping the food edible for up to five years.

The magic of Appalachia isn't sweet. It's "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But the punishment must fit the crime, so any curses or rites of retaliation magic should be justified.

THE MAGIC OF OLD GODS

Long before anyone lived in these hills, beings of immeasurable darkness and incomprehensible madness were entombed here. It was during this bygone age, when the Appalachians towered much higher and more menacing than the gentle slopes and ridges we know today, that they were conscripted after a great battle to serve as the final prison for those dark forces. But of course, time marches inexorably on. Eons passed, and the walls of the prison began to wear thin. And Things that slumbered soundlessly below for millennia began to stir and become restless.

They began to call to those who would hear them.

To dig. To seek and find. To follow and serve. To keep this dark and bloody land for themselves and their masters.

While real-world Appalachia has a deep sense of magic and wonder entwined in the place and peoples (see *Granny Magic and Witchcraft*, page 187), alternate Appalachia—the Appalachia of the Old Gods—has its own form of magic, one that's unique to the setting.

It's an ancient magic that runs as deep and dark and old as the land itself. A powerful and wholly unknowable magic that cares not for humanity and its trifles. A magic that, luckily for us, mostly still sleeps beneath the mountains and the hollers.

It's also a magic that characters in the game can tap into in various ways. It's possible to craft objects full of power, to call upon creatures and ask them for favors, to make life-altering (or life-taking) bargains with powerful entities. But of course, all magic in this setting comes with a price, one that must be paid.

There are many types of magic that live and grow in the world.



"Enough. Let us throw sizzling sticks of dynamite down howling black shafts, let the place where knees truly learn to bend blacken and ripple like the sea floor. Let the monstrous dome throats finally choke, let these temples fall because their God is dead, had been dying for decades. Let us mourn him properly now. They do not need our darkness to burn any more. So let us end this. Let there be Green. Great looming swaths of endless breathing mouths. Let them sing of our absence. Let the cities go dark for the lack of our smolder and let the stars find these mountains as they were made: whole, Green, and blessedly . . . empty."

—Season 1, Episode 2.5: *Let There Be Green*

THE GREEN

The Green is the manifestation and magic of life, a powerful force associated with elemental things. It's closely tied to holler medicine, granny magic, the natural world, growth, and decay.

- Bartholomew, page 384
- Kudzu Man, page 367
- The Witch Queen, page 384

THE THINGS

"The Things" refers to all the beings, entities, and magic connected to Those Who Sleep Beneath and the place they occupy, which is called the Inner Dark.

THE HIERARCHY OF THE THINGS

Low Things

Low Things are often mindless creatures and beings created by the Things to be their servitors and hunting dogs. They take shapes like reanimated corpses, unnatural wildlife, and so on.

- Beast of the Dark Earth, page 356
- Blank-Eyed Men, page 351
- Hollow Men, page 362
- The Hounds, page 364

Middle Things

Middle Things are also created by the Things, but they are powerful servants instead of servitors. Although they serve the Thing that created them, they have autonomy and thinking minds. They belong *to* the Things, but are not *of* the Things.

Middle Things:

- Lamp-Eyed Dead, page 368
- The Gray Ladies, page 358

The Green and the Inner Dark are considered by many to be opposing forces, but it's not unheard of for the two to work together when necessary.



Deep Things

Deep Things are true horrors, creatures that once slept beneath and have been sent up to work as direct agents of Those Who Sleep Beneath. They are often inhuman in form, although the most powerful can, with much effort, take and maintain a human shape. They vary in their strength and power and age, but the one thing they share is that the world wants to end them. Some have been destroyed and reshaped many times, while others have held their forms for generations.

- The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not, page 376

Those Who Sleep Beneath/Old Things

The Old Things are the creatures of darkness and consumption that were originally trapped beneath the mountains to protect the universe from being devoured. They are not gods, although many people think of them as such, and it's not undeserved, for their power is world-ending. Some believe they are one body and many minds, while others say they are one colossal beast. In truth, no one knows. Hopefully no one will ever know, for to meet them means that all has been lost in the world.

There are no Old Things in this game, as they would end not just the PCs, but the world itself. They are, instead, the dangers that lie half awake and ever unseen in the dark.

OTHERS

There are many other kinds of supernatural magic in this land that are independent of and not connected to either the Green or the Inner Dark, such as ghosts, monsters, and other entities. Some of these take the shapes of humans in some form or another, while others are beasts of legends and myths, shaped into being through time and telling.

- The Dead Queen, page 354
- The Boy, page 352
- J.T. Fields III, page 366
- Not Deer, page 369
- The Railroad Man, page 370
- White thing, page 381



The next couple of weeks were spent preparing the working they'd need to perform at the new moon. There were herbs and stones and other items that needed to be gathered and blessed. There were notes that Marcie had taken when she spoke with Bartholomew that she needed to compare with Miz Marigold's, and there was plenty to teach Deeley, who'd never taken part in any group ritual, much less something on this scale. Nina, Indiana and Melvin assisted wherever they could, but the bulk of the work fell to the women who'd be performing the binding, and that burden they'd have to shoulder alone.

—Season 2, Episode 30: The Dead Queen

THE POWER OF PLACE AND TIME

The land itself is an important part of Appalachia, and many people believe that places in the world have power—some good, some bad, some neutral, but all potent. Liminal spaces, such as a crossroads, the bank of a river, or a doorway, are considered especially powerful.

Cycles, such as the passage of time, also play an important role in magic. In-between times, like right at dawn, noon, sunset, or midnight, are especially meaningful, often making it easier to bridge the gap between the living and the dead.

The cycle of the year is the metaphorical tale of the life cycle: birth, growth, mating, growing old, dying, and rebirth. Regardless of the name by which they're called, certain times of the year hold greater power than others. These times are winter solstice (December 20–23), Imbolc (February 1), spring equinox (March 19–20), Beltane (May 1), summer solstice (June 19–23), Michaelmas (August 1), autumn equinox (September 21–24), and Samhain (November 1).

Likewise, following the logic of the power of cycles, workings performed at the new moon or full moon are more powerful than those performed at the quarter phases.

CEREMONIES, CELEBRATIONS, AND MUSIC

Appalachians love to come together to celebrate—weddings, births, baptisms, a new house, a new job, and of course the many religious celebrations that occur. They also come together during sad times, such as funerals.

Courtships are generally short. Wedding ceremonies are often held in the home of the bride or at their family's church, with the couple wearing their best clothes. And many couples are married at a county courthouse and then hold a reception at the bride's home. The community, often organized by the Ladies' Auxiliary, brings food and dessert to celebrate the couple.

From springtime until the autumn, baptisms are conducted in local rivers that are deep enough for full submersion of the one being baptized. Those who profess belief in Christianity during the winter typically delay baptism until the river thaws.

At Easter and Christmas, almost all members of the community attend some type of gathering, whether or not it's religious in nature.

Funerals often bring family and friends from distant communities together to mourn the passing of a beloved person. The deceased is often washed by their closest family members, dressed in their best clothes, and laid out in a coffin (or sometimes simply on a long trestle table) that is placed in the front room of the family's home. Neighbors, again likely organized by the Ladies' Auxiliary, bring food and comfort to the grieving family, and help take care of the family's farm and animals while they grieve. The deceased is most often buried in a family cemetery that might be on or adjacent to the land they occupied while living, or might be in another town.

No matter the occasion, no matter how small or large the gathering, whether it's a joyous celebration or bitter mourning, music is played. Fiddles, banjos, guitars, and perhaps a dulcimer—many of them lovingly

made by those playing them—are brought out and played to celebrate just-wedded couples, augment weekly religious ceremonies, mourn the passing of loved ones, or just enjoy the sweet sound of music on a beautiful summer evening.

PROHIBITION (1920–1933)

His younger brother Arnie had run the town's only saloon up until prohibition passed, at which point the brothers had done what any sensible businessman would do: they converted Arnie's bar into a fine, upstanding diner of the sort you wouldn't mind to take your mama to, and moved all the taps and all the liquor into the basement of the hardware store, where for a very small and reasonable fee, one could join Billy and Arnie's "chess club," and drink privately to their hearts' content.

—Season 2, Episode 18:
Where the Cold Wind Blows

When the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages went into effect on January 17, 1920, much of the United States was already dry. Ostensibly, the popularity of the temperance movement and execution of prohibition laws was to protect families from the scourge of drunkenness, but in reality, groups such as the Anti-Saloon League were hardly more than a hate group, railing against immigration and subsequent cultural changes of which they didn't approve.

While there are certainly bootleggers in Appalachia, for most folks looking to imbibe, it's more like belonging to **Arnie's chess club** or a similar organization. Speakeasies are simple enough to locate for those who go looking. And each granny witch knows who to contact to get more moonshine for her remedies.

COMMUNICATIONS



The telephone was a recent miracle to Baker's Gap, and not every household had one of course, but the town proper was all wired up, and she knew that most of these boys' families fell well within the bounds. Curtis Kilgore might not, but the Stallards across the way could run and tell his mama he was safe here too. She went to her desk and pulled out the roll where each child's name, address, and newly penciled-in phone exchange, if there was one, would be listed.

—Season 2, Episode 16:
Between the Unburied and Miss Belle

Local and regional newspapers are an excellent source of equal parts information and gossip. The serious news—both national and local—is on the front pages. The editorials, letters to the editor, and local interest pieces—the real news, in other words—is well below the fold.

Magazines from all over the nation can be bought at the drugstore. These beautiful, colorful tomes contain everything from serialized stories to the latest Hollywood gossip to the best recipe for apple stack cake.

The radio is a staple of communications for inhabitants of Appalachia. They gather around the radio multiple times each day to hear the news or listen to their favorite music or program. Sporting events, like baseball games, are also broadcast over the airwaves.

Telephones connect the inhabitants of Appalachia like no other technology. With this telephonic miracle, you can pick up the handset, tell the operator an exchange number, and be talking to a neighbor in a matter of seconds, saving you the time and energy it would take to walk to their house.



Arnie's chess club, page 229

The Barter Theatre of Abingdon, Virginia, opens its doors for the first time on June 10, 1933, with the slogan, "With vegetables you cannot sell, you can buy a good laugh." An admission ticket is 40 cents or an equivalent amount of vegetables or dairy products.

The first Piggly Wiggly opens in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1916, and other locations spread quickly throughout the southern portions of Appalachia. It's the first grocery store to allow customers to gather their own goods instead of providing a list to the grocer.

Incorporated in 1893 as a mail-order firm, the Sears, Roebuck and Co. catalog of the early twentieth century is today's equivalent of online shopping. Goods—from jewelry to coffee pots to live baby chicks—could be perused in the catalog, purchased by sending a form through the mail, and received through delivery by the U.S. Postal Service. The first brick-and-mortar Sears store opened on February 2, 1925, in Chicago.

Charles Lindbergh completes the first nonstop transatlantic flight (Long Island, New York to Paris, France) on May 20–21, 1927. The idea of travel far from home is now more a reality than ever before in history.

If you're interested in learning more about Appalachia, we encourage you to seek out histories written by those who tell their own stories.

OCCUPATIONS AND COMMERCE

Many occupations in Appalachia, such as mining, milling, logging, and farming, are quite dangerous. And because this is before the acceptance, albeit reluctant, of unionization, there aren't many protective practices in place to ensure the safety of workers, including children. It's up to the workers to keep themselves safe, so workplace injuries are frequent and deaths are not uncommon. Many occupations expose the workers to heavy dust, chemicals, poisons, and unhealthy environments.

There are economic avenues other than dangerous, hard physical labor. These include working at company-owned and -run general goods stores, owning and operating an independent grocery store, working as a clerk at a bank, raising and selling hogs to the local butcher, providing mechanical and blacksmithing services, and more. There are many ways to earn income, even in the most rural town.

Another form of commerce is trading or bartering. A family with a surplus crop of tomatoes might barter some of them for milk from their neighbor. Likewise, goods can be bartered for services, such as a slaughtered hog for carpentry work. While bartering is popular, it's not a main source of commerce.

TRANSPORTATION

Routes of travel vary from well-worn footpaths and game trails in the hollers to dirt-packed roads in towns and paved roads in cities.

For short distances, walking is the most common means of travel, with riding a horse or driving a horse and buggy being the second most popular. Automobiles are not quite common at this time, but there are likely a few families in each community who own a vehicle, so the road is a shared space for pedestrians, horse riders, buggy drivers, and automobiles.

The increase in automobile ownership in the late 1920s brings with it better road conditions, so dirt- and gravel-packed roads are becoming more rare. Certainly a town's main street and its offshoots are paved with asphalt, and cities have paved streets.

The Blue Ridge Transportation Company (BRTC) provides regional bus service throughout Appalachia, primarily connecting smaller towns lacking train stations. Traveling by bus is affordable, though not quite reliable because buses often suffer breakdowns. BRTC buses can carry up to 24 passengers plus the driver comfortably. Passengers tell the bus driver their destinations as they step onto the bus, paying 5 cents per stop. Buses are used by anyone wanting to travel in the region; they are frequently used by traveling salespeople, who take up extra space with their cases full of detergent samples or electric sweepers. The curvy roads of the area wind around the hillsides, which makes for beautiful viewing as long as you aren't prone to car sickness. Due to the curviness of the roads, it can take as long as an hour to travel 10 miles.

Train travel is popular and reliable, and regional trips are fairly affordable. Railroads carry people, goods, and the mail all across the United States.



Mountain boys are tough, resourceful, and work hard. Mountain boys do what's best for their family, no matter how hard or how painful. This went double and sometimes triple in the mines. Hordes of boys from 9 and 10 years and up working as greasers and tippers and other mind-bogglingly dangerous jobs miles underground. Boys hauling buckets of hot engine grease by hand, working in the direct path of mine cars, boys sorting through coal with little to no breathing help, or even proper tools. The number of boys who never came home was astounding. We were literally feeding our children, our babies, to the bloody maw of old coal and teaching them that it was all there was.

—Season 1, Episode 5: The Boy



APPALACHIAN RAILROADS

The railroad came to Appalachia for the purpose of commerce, rumbling steam engines carrying coal and other freight from one mountain stronghold to another. Mining towns, lumber camps, steel mills—all of them are likely built along railroad lines, or else new track is laid to reach them. You need all three to keep the train running and expanding: coal to feed the steam engines, lumber for the crossties, and steel for the rails.

While these railroad tracks were laid for the purpose of carrying cargo, most towns also have passenger service, though the frequency of passenger trains may vary by season. Passenger trains are as comfortable as they are speedy: they're carpeted, with plentiful upholstered seating and running water. On long routes, meals are served in the designated dining car, with passengers dressing in finery to attend, and travelers can rest overnight in sleeping cars.

TWEETSIE

The East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad is known around here as Tweetsie due to the shrill *tweet tweet* of its whistle. The train line runs through the craggy Blue Ridge Mountains that divide Tennessee from North Carolina, gaining

about a thousand feet of elevation on the way. It took more than railroad spikes and crossties to make those steep mountain passes safe: the men who laid the tracks wove each section with magic, binding whatever lies sleeping in the stone below. We hope every day that those bindings hold.

Tweetsie only runs scheduled passenger trains in the summer months, but the rail line generally has a spirit of positive service. Conductors are known to do errands for those who live along the route, go out of their way to help local communities, and look the other way when impoverished passengers stow away in freight cars.

Tweetsie runs from **Boone, North Carolina** to **Passelbranch, Tennessee**. Fare to traverse the entire line is \$7.

BARROW & LOCKE

The Barrow & Locke Mining and Railroad Combine owns most of the mines up and down Appalachia—and, of course, they own and maintain the rail that serves those mines. Whether you're looking to reach a big city or a coal camp so small it doesn't even have a name, B&L's a sure bet.

Traveling along the line from one station to the next costs \$5. Express trains connect major hubs, like **Paradise** and **Boone**, at a reduced rate.

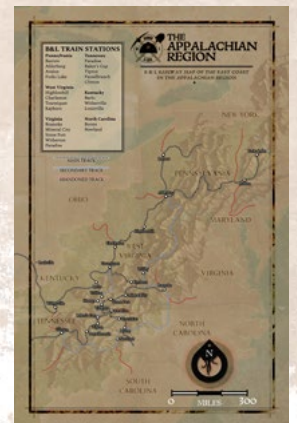
To use the train to reach remote coal camps without passenger service, your best bet is train hopping.

Safely stowing away in a freight car is a level 3 Speed task. Characters are hindered if the train does not come to a complete stop.

Boone, page 212

Passelbranch, page 237

You can find a B&L railway map just on the back inside cover of this book.



Paradise, page 250

Chapter II: PENNSYLVANIA

If you're a player, stop right here and check with the GM before reading any further, just in case they want to keep some of this secret for now.

Forks Lake, page 200
Barrow & Locke, page 193

Pennsylvania is Appalachia's most isolated state, on the northeastern outskirts with only a bit of the state line touching West Virginia. But it doesn't take much for rot to spread—you just need one spoiled apple in the bunch, or one moldy potato in the sack, and all the rest will decay in short order. Just the same, the company known as the **Barrow & Locke Mining and Railroad Combine**, or B&L for short, has grown like a fungus all across Appalachia. Their conquest began in Pennsylvania's own town of Barrow, and it's from there that the corruption spreads, carried on trains filled with coal, blackening lungs and blackening hearts wherever its railway tendrils reach.

Pennsylvania is largely mining territory, the ground rich with coal, and since Barrow & Locke runs the state's coal mines and railroad, they've got more power than any man, monster, or mining company should. If a town's good to them, they're good to it. Which means coal-rich towns like Barrow grow fat and prosperous, while smaller mines like **Avalon** are abandoned by B&L as soon

Avalon, page 197

as things go wrong, leaving all the trouble behind and none of the wealth. Steel towns like **Forks Lake** purchase coal delivered by rail and use it to power foundries—an industry that the Barrow family hasn't yet gotten a hand in, though not for lack of trying.

BARROW

Today, Barrow is a dead town, an invisible town, an impossible town.

But it was not always this way.

How it came to be what it is today is the story of a family unleashing a power so great that it's spoken of only in whispered tongues, if it's spoken of at all.

BECOMING BARROW

Before the town of Barrow—and before the Barrow family, for whom the town was eventually named—there was the prosperous town of Pinegrove, deep in the mountains of Pennsylvania.

It was in this region that the Barrow family took up residence in the eighteenth



In the gathering dusk on Coal Hill, the employees of the Barrow Mining Company were still gathered, rooted in the place where they had listened to E.P.'s address. Their mouths hung slack and their eyes stretched wide, cast skyward, a light the color of rotten plums blossoming in those dilated black portals. The dust . . . or soot . . . or whatever it was that had issued from the breach swept through the unresistant crowd like a swarm of locusts, moving through each body in turn to consume blood and soft tissue, and carve out the living soul that resided in each, creating empty vessels for the Barrow family to work its will upon the world, and leaving them as hollow as hollow can be.

And with its capital thus established, the Barrow Mining Company set its sights on expansion.

—Season 3, Episode 32: *Runs in the Family*



century, successfully working and mining the land for the next hundred years. By the 1800s, they were the most influential family of the region.

Which brings us to the day that Pinegrove was renamed Barrow to honor the region's most prominent family.

On that fateful day, E.P. Barrow, the patriarch of the family, stood before the inhabitants, seemingly to celebrate the success of his coal company and town. But instead of delivering an uplifting speech to all those gathered to commemorate the accomplishments and generosity of the Barrow family, E.P. began to conduct a nefarious sacrament to connect with Those Who Sleep Beneath. He contorted his mouth and produced unholy sounds that “pierced the ear and clouded the mind” of all who heard him.

And that was the last day of the town's existence as anything other than the unassailable headquarters of the Barrow family.

Where once the streets teemed with folks going about their lives—shopping at the general store, doing business at the bank, children going to school—Barrow is now a dark place given over to Those Who Sleep Beneath. It is the entrance and exit wound upon the land where the Barrow family made contact with the Things Under the Mountain; and in so doing, the family further solidified their power and began expanding their empire, keeping Barrow as their protected headquarters, tucked safely in the mountains.

THE TOWN TODAY

No one other than members of the Barrow family reside in Barrow, so there are no regular businesses other than the Barrow home office. Reality is broken in and around the town, so only the rare few summoned to Barrow by the family can find it. If they're allowed to leave—which isn't guaranteed by any means—they're unable to remember most of what they experienced while in Barrow, which is very fortunate for them indeed.

Barrow is crawling with Hollow Men (or hollowed), but they aren't like other Hollow Men, as there's nothing left of the people they used to be. They don't have enough will

If you've ever wondered (or perhaps “worried” is a much better term) what the world would look like if Those Who Sleep Beneath woke and had their way, look no further than Barrow. For it is, in miniature, a prototype of exactly the way the world would end.

even to be sent out into the world at large to do the Barrows' bidding. They might strike out at those who approach, based on an old directive from the Barrows to guard the place from outsiders, but otherwise, they stand around, empty-eyed, an unnatural light coming from their permanently dilated pupils.

In addition to the home office of Barrow Mineral Resources, the town holds the dilapidated remnants of the Pinegrove Inn, Bernard's General Store, jail, stables, and First Baptist Church. There is a cemetery behind the church.

HOME OFFICE OF BARROW MINERAL RESOURCES

The home office of Barrow Mineral Resources, also known as Barrow House, sits atop Coal Hill and is a massive, foreboding structure with limestone columns, topped with a copper dome. A chasm, brought into existence by the ritual conducted by E.P. Barrow, extends into the building's foundations, forming a massive gap in the basement's marble floor. No one knows if



The sun had just sunk beneath the hills, painting the sky in orange fire, when the sleek black Cadillac pulled up the gently-curving, paved road that wound up Coal Hill to the stately limestone mansion that had come to be known as Barrow House, which had served as the family's base of operations now for more than a hundred years.

—Season 3, Episode 32:
Runs in the Family

Barrow: Finding the town is a level 8 Intellect task; being summoned to town eases that by three steps.

Hollow Men, page 362

E.P. Barrow: level 8

Polly Barrow: level 7, intimidation and Might-based tasks as level 8; health 30; can communicate telepathically with E.P. from almost anywhere in Appalachia

Conrad Barrow: level 4

E.P. is dead, alive, or something in between, even as he continues to deliver instructions to his loyal descendants from his coffin within the chasm beneath the home office.

THE CHASM

The chasm starts at the foot of Coal Hill and ends in the foundation of the Barrow Mineral Resources home office. The crevice into which E.P. descended isn't visible from outside Barrow House, as it's literally in the basement and the house is built around and over it.

COAL HILL

Located at the center of town, Coal Hill was the Barrow Mining Company's flagship mine and the foundation of the Barrow family fortune. The home office of Barrow Mineral Resources sits on its crown.

During the time period of this setting, which is the 1920s and '30s, Barrow is essentially a dead town. If you wish to set your game earlier, when the town was still alive, you can, of course, do so. If you want to learn more about the history of Barrow, listen to podcast episode 32 of season 3: Runs in the Family.



Polly Barrow was everything the Barrow patriarch could have desired in his progeny—brilliant, beautiful, and strong. Oh, so strong. Her particular talents began to manifest at the tender age of three, when a well-meaning nanny clasped the hand of the fussy toddler, who wanted to stay outside and chase lightning bugs around the family's sprawling country estate rather than come inside for dinner. The young woman had meant only to draw the little girl alongside her into the house, but Polly responded with force, her tiny hand morphing suddenly into a huge gauntlet, armored with plates of bone. Little Polly had simply crushed the bones of the nanny's hand, and then—her mutant paw returned to its normal dimensions—slipped free of her pulpy grasp and returned to trailing her new glowing friends around the manicured lawn.

—Season 3, Episode 32: Runs in the Family

THE BARROW FAMILY

Decades after the town was renamed in their honor, the Barrow family consists of the following:

E.P. BARROW

After the chasm opened from Coal Hill to the home office, E.P. was interred alive in that seam in the earth. He still runs Barrow & Locke from his grave, communicating with his descendants in the same unnatural language that opened the chasm and turned the working men hollow in the first place.

POLLY BARROW

Polly was born on a bleak winter night, when E.P.'s wooden coffin rose up from the depths beneath the home office with a new addition: a beautiful baby girl with black hair, pale skin, and amber eyes. She was raised to be her father's weapon, strong and relentless, faithful and deferential, something entirely other than human. Her brothers may resent her for being E.P.'s favorite, but it makes no difference to Polly, who takes great joy in following her father's most violent orders. Of all the Barrow heirs, Polly has the strongest telepathic communication with E.P., hearing his voice in her head even when she's far away from the home office.

Today, Polly's gorgeous looks hide her ruthlessness. She makes her home in Pittsburgh, in a penthouse suite atop the finest hotel in the city, but often works in Barrow—when she's not traveling up and down Appalachia supervising Barrow & Locke ventures and stepping in when workers need to be nudged back into line.

CONRAD BARROW

Conrad killed his brother Benue and buried him along with E.P. in a pact with the Inner Dark; it's no matter that Benue came right back from the dead, and E.P.'s death didn't stop him from running the company. That leaves Conrad the only remaining mortal member of the Barrow clan. As such, he represents Barrow & Locke's business interests as the public face of the mining company.

Conrad's less likely to go on a rampage than Benue, and not nearly as powerful as Polly, but he's not as content as he once was with glad-handing on his father's behalf. He



isn't reckless, though, and he knows when he's outmatched, so he's biding his time, waiting for just the right moment to take control of Barrow for himself.

BENUEL BARROW

Benue has been dead for decades, but that's never seemed to stop him. He carries out E.P.'s will, working to expand Barrow & Locke by intimidating landowners into giving over their homes, and encouraging union organizers to stay silent—visits from a dead man can be powerful motivation to comply. Like most haints who have overstayed their welcome, Benue's become harder to control over the years. He might be sent to assess the productivity of a coal camp for E.P. and end up laying waste to the entire town. Replacing workforces is costly and inefficient—and that's where pretty Polly Barrow comes in, as her methods are much more understated than her elder brother's.

AVALON

It's not always a straight line from life to death: sometimes dead things don't die all the way, or don't stay buried in the graves you so carefully dug for them. Haints, revenants—we all know their kind, though some of us may be lucky enough to lack firsthand experience.

Well, Avalon's what you get when a whole town becomes a revenant. A town with one foot in the grave, giving itself over to decay around its inhabitants. It used to be that Avalon was a modestly successful **Barrow & Locke** mining town, until the mine caught fire, sapping the tunnels of air, leaving what men didn't burn alive to suffocate, leaving the mine entirely useless to B&L.

That was eleven years ago now, and Barrow & Locke has moved on, but Avalon's been halfway dead ever since it lost its main industry and most of its working men in one afternoon. The folks that remain make their living selling supplies to the **Titan Logging Camp** in the winter and sending textiles out on the train in the off season. They're

Benue Barrow: level 6, destroys things as level 7; health 25; Armor 1; damage inflicted 7 points (or 9 points when angry)

Becoming Barrow, page 194

Titan Logging Camp, page 199

friendly people, but they may not trust you right away; they've been burned before, used up and abandoned, and that leaves a scar. What most of Avalon's 200 residents don't talk about—though some of 'em badly want to talk about it—is what happened to all those men down in the mines, the haints resulting from their unclean deaths. Can a half-dead town, a town that's a revenant itself, be haunted? Avalon's where to look if you want to find out.

AROUND AVALON

Avalon started out as a wide-spread town—a place for folks who like to be left alone and don't much care for neighbors peering over their fences. So as the population decreased year over year, most of that sprawl's been left abandoned. For every inhabited home, there are at least three falling apart for lack of maintenance, crawling with mice and other such vermin. Folks from out of town sometimes squat in those empty houses—mostly men stopping through on their way to Titan at the beginning of the season. It's a wonder they can sleep, with how the wind through the rattling boards sounds like voices, with how those homes seem liable to fall apart around them.

The train comes through the station at the center of town once a week and doesn't linger, unloading goods and packing up what little Avalon has to offer before taking off north toward **Forks Lake**. The wooded roads that lead out of Avalon are poorly maintained, snowbound in the winter and muddy in the spring, often blocked by downed branches.

Mayor Peel and Sheriff Gates have their offices above the general store, which is kitty-corner from the train station. There's also a single jail cell for miscreants at the back of the store, but the worst misdeeds around here lately have been teenagers smashing windows of abandoned homes or messing around with the old hand-crank elevator at the mine. There's a certain irresistible romance to abandoned places, especially for folks too young to really remember why those places were abandoned in the first place.

Layton Nash runs the store, which is well stocked with dry goods when the train's just come, and desolate when the train is

due again. Layton's a soft-spoken man who makes extra money sharpening knives on a grindstone behind the store; it may be hard to get so much as a "good evening" from him, but he knows his way around a blade. His silence hides a great deal of worry: he thinks it's time to pack up his family and leave Avalon, but there's no one to take over the store in his absence. Most of all he worries that his eldest son, fourteen-year-old **Samuel Jack**, has fallen in with the wrong crowd—but it's not like his son is spoiled for choice, when the school's only got nine students. He knows his boy's been poking around the old mine entrance and getting up to all kinds of foolishness in abandoned houses, and the last thing he wants is to see Samuel Jack brought in by Sheriff Gates for messing with something he should've left alone.

THE OLD MINE

The fire in the mine began with a tipped-over lantern just inside the only entrance. The coal went up easy, leaving no way for men to get out—and no way for air to get in. It was suffocation that got most of 'em, not the fire itself, as the blaze sucked all the air out of the deeper tunnels. The elevators down the mineshaft, already worse for wear, were left nearly inoperable by the time the fire had burned out. The safest way down now is to climb.

And every man and boy who suffocated as a result of that fire? Nothing but decay came to claim them. Their loved ones placed grave markers in the cemetery at the edge of town, but their bodies were left sprawled out right where they fell. Samuel Jack Nash climbed down the mineshaft on a dare from his friends, and, while he didn't venture too far down the tunnels, he came back saying that those bodies hadn't rotted right. Eleven years from the fire, he expected to find only bones—maybe he could bring back something gruesome to show off. Instead, he found the bodies mostly intact, covered in mushrooms and mold. The smell has seemed to follow him ever since, no matter how much he washes.

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines. Fare is \$15 for passage to Barrow and \$12 for passage to Forks Lake.

Forks Lake, page 200

Layton Nash: level 3, knife-related tasks (including attacks) as level 5

TITAN LOGGING CAMP

Every winter, farmers from all over eastern Pennsylvania take on work at Titan Logging Camp, 4 miles (6.5 km) outside of Avalon. Avalon's the last town on the way to the camp, and all the men pass through it as they come and go, and return to Avalon for supplies.

Men who work in these woods know that just before the freeze, the soil is made of what remains of the autumn leaves. The rich muddy smell that clings to your boots and trousers—that's just nature's newest decay. They're familiar with loss, seeing as logging is dangerous work, and they've got a respect for things that give themselves over to the ground and rot. Hell, the very earth dies every winter and comes back to life in the spring.

But that's not the case when it comes to Avalon. Trees die, people die, and so do towns, but Titan's foreman **Mr. Amos** isn't willing to let Avalon go. He's only here for half the year, but he's determined to keep this town alive, even if he has to do it himself. He says it's just practical: the next closest town to Titan is 15 miles (24 km) in the opposite direction, and he'd lose man-hours on supply runs. The truth is that his pa worked in Avalon's mine, and his grandpa before that, and Amos is lucky to be alive, but he'll carry his guilt to his grave. By all rights, he should've worked the mine, should've died down there with his father, but he ran away as a young man with his heart set on Philadelphia. By the time he came back to Avalon, it was too late for his pa.

But maybe it's not too late for Avalon—not if Amos can get to the heart of the mine, the source of the rot that's dragging the whole town down, and find a way to set things right.

WHO'S WHO IN AVALON

MAYOR PEEL

Murray Peel never set out to be Avalon's mayor: he stumbled into the title after the mine fire and resulting exodus. The way **Mayor Peel** sees it, Avalon is a perfectly fine town full of workaday people who just need a light hand on the tiller. He doesn't try to do much in the way of passing and enforcing laws, and honestly hopes to god someone runs against him in the next election—someone who can bring new life to the town, and help Sheriff Gates keep folks from messing around with the mineshaft.

SHERIFF GATES

Reeve Gates gives a lot of thought to how to protect Avalon from dangers coming from inside (of which there are many) and doesn't much concern himself with dangers coming from outside (of which there are few). He knows boys are reckless, restless, and often bored around here. He also knows that nothing good can come from hanging around the mine, where he finds Samuel Jack and his set most nights. Truth is, the sheriff is terrified that someday he'll be called upon to climb down into the mineshaft to pull those boys out if they get stuck. He thinks the best decision would be to barricade the entrance, and that's what he's set on doing, whether or not Mayor Peel agrees.

SAMUEL JACK NASH

Samuel Jack is only fourteen, but he hasn't been the same since the first time he climbed down the mineshaft. He did it to show Billy Preece that he wasn't scared, and he wasn't—maybe a little at the start, but everything felt calm and quiet underground. There was something calm and quiet about those wrongly rotting bodies, too. A kind of peace that Samuel Jack had never found at home, or at school, or at the general store, or at church. It made him want to reach out and touch the dead men's moldy skin, pluck the mushrooms growing from their eye sockets.

Now he finds that all he wants is to go back down there. When he's not in the old mine, he's daydreaming about the next time he will be. He's even started working out how to repair the elevator, hoping to bring some of those bodies back up to the surface with him. The only problem is that the damp smell of underground, fungus and coal dust and soot, seems to follow him everywhere. Well, the smell and whatever's happened to his skin. At first it was just a patch on his forearm, mostly hidden by his sleeve, that started going gray and scaly. Now it looks like the mold is growing out of him, softly coating him from his wrist to his elbow.

Samuel Jack's father taught him the importance of discernment, and he has a feeling something's not right about this. But he has no idea how to ask his dad for help, because that would mean admitting to going into the mine in the first place. Maybe he's better off going away, before all of this

Sheriff Gates: level 4; carries a pistol

Mr. Amos: level 4; carries a double-headed axe (asset on noncombat axe tasks)

Samuel Jack Nash: level 3, understanding magic as level 2

Mayor Peel: level 4, persuasion and intimidation as level 3

AVALON HUSHED MURMURS

SOMETHING UNDERNEATH

There's something lurking in the tunnels beneath Avalon. It started with townsfolk hearing rumbling from underground, then rattling and thumping, then growling—a sound so deep that you feel it more than you hear it. Dogs and horses have started disappearing from the homes closest to the mines, their paws and hooves turning up days later, looking like they've been gnawed on.

Sheriff Gates has no interest in going down there himself—he says his bones are too old to make the climb—but he's looking for someone fearless and agile enough to get to the bottom of this.

The Boy, page 352
Mr. Amos, page 199

Sheriff Gates, page 199

TROUBLE IN TITAN

Logging is dangerous work—the men working Titan Logging Camp know this. They've had their share of men and boys fall on the job. It's heartbreaking every time, but it comes with the territory.

A danger the men didn't anticipate, however, is *The Boy*: a boy carrying a lantern who speaks with a man's voice, holding *Mr. Amos* at fault for every boy who's died cutting trees in this corner of the woods. Titan's men have taken to all manner of banishment and binding rituals, but *The Boy* still appears each night.

THE PREECE BOYS

Samuel Jack's pretty much attached at the hip to his two closest friends, Billy and Levi Preece. The Preece twins have come up missing—Samuel Jack can't find them in any of their usual haunts—and he's determined to get his friends back.

gets worse. Maybe Samuel Jack will just go down into the mine, into that peaceful underground place, and lie down beside the dead men, and let the mold grow all over him forever.

FORKS LAKE

Forks Lake, a steel town in Pennsylvania's northeast corner that's home to some 800 souls, hosts the northernmost railroad station serviced by Barrow & Locke—for now. B&L's busy laying track to expand the rail line north into New York. The railroad crews live in work camps for a couple of weeks at a time before they trek back to Forks Lake for supplies, and the welcome awaiting them isn't always a warm one.

See, tensions are high between Barrow & Locke and local businesses, and it all comes down to one Eleanor Hubbert. She owns the Forks Steel Plant, a foundry that keeps Forks Lake alive. Ms. Hubbert's steelworkers are proudly unionized, while B&L, to the contrary, ruthlessly suppresses all organization efforts—and the higher-ups back in Barrow are feeling a bit peeved that Eleanor would encourage her workers to bargain. It sets a

precedent in Forks Lake, gives working men the idea that they can demand better, and nowadays the railroad men don't look at the steelworkers the same way. It doesn't help that B&L keeps trying to buy Eleanor out, and the woman just won't budge.

Whether they're in favor of Barrow & Locke or support independent businesses like Forks Steel, everyone in town's taken a side. And it doesn't matter if you proudly shop at the B&L Company Store or close your shutters extra tight when *Polly Barrow* pays a visit: things in Forks Lake are far past their boiling point, hotter than molten pig iron and just as deadly.

AROUND FORKS LAKE

Forks Lake forms a C-shape around its namesake, a placid lake with an unexpectedly deep center. The town's working men are divided between Forks Steel Plant and the B&L rail expansion project. It used to be that Ms. Hubbert employed most of the men in town, but more and more railroad workers keep arriving on the train, skewing the numbers toward B&L. Folks like *Cordelia Guy* worry that Forks Lake is well on its way to becoming B&L

Polly Barrow, page 196

Cordelia Guy: level 4, all social interaction as level 5

territory—and who knows what’ll happen to its people then?

Railroad workers mostly stick to the train station and the B&L Company Store. The store, on the north edge of the town square, wasn’t always run by B&L. It used to be a family business, run by an old man named Mr. Rutherford who’d inherited the shop from his grandfather. But Mr. Rutherford died and Barrow & Locke made his widow an offer: a large sum of money in exchange for full rights to the business. Now the B&L store takes scrip as well as legal tender, and the staff aren’t nearly as sociable as they used to be.

The B&L Company Store is perfectly serviceable, stocked with all your basic goods, but that didn’t stop Cordelia Guy from opening her own store right across the town square, with the Forks Steel Plant logo flying in the front window. Now something as simple as where you buy your canned beans is a declaration of loyalty one way or another. Either you’re for Forks Lake and her hardworking people, or you’re for the big shots from Barrow who want to squeeze everyone out of their homes and businesses. Cordelia’s nabbed a fair share of the market, customers who will gladly pay a few cents more if it means pushing back against B&L. And if anyone asks her about it, she acts as innocent as the day is long: “Why, we’re a big enough town for two general stores, don’t you agree? I simply saw a need in the community and I filled it.”

Along with the two competing stores, the town square also hosts the newly renovated city hall. It’s a far bigger building than it needs to be, made of limestone and topped with a copper dome, with marble floors inside the main entrance that cause each footstep to echo up to the painted ceiling and back. It’s downright garish in a town of practical brick and wood buildings, but the materials were donated to **Mayor Gilbert** by the Barrow family, and the mayor would never turn down a thing like that. It means he and **Sheriff Sweet** both have slick new offices, and the sheriff can easily keep an eye on the jail in the basement, and there’s even a little library in the back. The wide-open ground floor is the perfect space to host the occasional social, with Forks Lake’s finest musicians taking advantage of the acoustics.

The Barrow family has made monetary contributions to Forks Lake’s coffers, too, and Mayor Gilbert’s working his way down the long list of public utilities that need repairing, refurbishing, or renovating. Next up is the schoolhouse, which badly needs a new roof—lessons are canceled in the fall and winter due to weather, more often than not. After the schoolhouse, the mayor plans to tend to the boathouse, a falling-down shack at the south end of town full of half-rotted canoes. He says it might be nice for people to do some leisurely rowing on a balmy day, and the thick smoke from Forks Steel rarely blows out that way. What the mayor might not realize is that **Cal Bouvet** has taken over the boathouse with his moonshine stills, selling liquor in secret on the shore. Cal’s even patched up some of the old boats, and men from Forks Steel row across the lake for a drink after a day’s work.

If Forks Lake is shaped like the letter C, Forks Steel Plant sits at the very top edge. The foundry is a hot, stinking beast: coal fires, men shouting as they work the crucibles, heaps of cooling slag running down toward the water. For all the commotion, Forks Steel runs smoothly under **Eleanora Hubbert**’s attention. Eleanora’s a tall, ruthless woman with a voice like a million half-smoked cigarettes, best known for her shining steel-toed boots and her ability to make any steelworker under her care feel valuable to the operation at large. She’s a steel heiress from Chicago who struck out to make her own name at the turn of the century. She found something worth more than pride or money in Forks Lake: this is her home, her family, and her calling. She brings out the best in her men, and they reward her with their skill and loyalty.

Loyalty goes both ways, too. Ms. Hubbert refuses to sell her business to Barrow & Locke, no matter how many times they come knocking. Last month Polly Barrow paid Eleanora a visit and slipped a few veiled threats into polite tea-time conversation, but Eleanora didn’t flinch. Polly came back and offered to buy Forks Steel Plant for the highest sum yet, but Eleanora declined. When Polly comes to Forks Lake for the third time, she just might come bearing a **deadly gift**.

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines. Fare is \$12 for passage to Avalon (page 197).

Cal Bouvet: level 4, moonshining and avoiding the gaze of the law as level 5; carries two engraved flasks inside his overcoat—one says “Hope” and the other says “Fear”

Not many folk from around here have been to Barrow; if they had, they’d think the brand-new city hall looks just like the B&L home office from the outside.

Eleanora Hubbert: level 4, resists intimidation as level 6; wears a protective necklace from her granny (asset on Intellect defense)

Mayor Gilbert: level 3, perception as level 2

Sheriff Sweet: level 4; carries two pistols and a set of steel handcuffs

FORKS LAKE HUSHED MURMURS

STEELWORKERS, HOLLOWED

After Polly Barrow's latest visit, half of Eleanora Hubbert's steelworkers—steadfast, hardworking men—changed overnight. They're quiet where they used to be talkative, snappish and mean-spirited when they do speak, and their work just isn't up to snuff. She knows something is wrong, but anyone she approaches for information goes glassy-eyed and unfocused until she changes the subject.

FIRE, FIRE, FIRE

Come quick: someone's started a fire at Cordelia Guy's store! Instead of the normal roar and crackle of flames, Mayor Gilbert says it sounds like hammering railroad spikes, and Sheriff Sweet says it sounds like the whistle of an oncoming train.

DEEP WATERS

Three steelworkers rowing across Forks Lake to the old boathouse never made it to their destination, and dragging the lake turned up no sign of them. The school kids have taken to spreading rumors, convinced it was either ghosts or a monster made of duckweed, but six-year-old Tommy Tate was playing with his marbles on the banks and swears it was something altogether different. He says people's shadows don't look quite right as they approach the waterline, like they've been stretched out, and shadows don't normally have pinpricks of light where the eyes would go.



Chapter 12: KENTUCKY

Kentucky's wealth comes from the ground, and it comes at a high cost. In the eastern coalfields, where the coal seams follow the mountain ridges, you'll find towns like Barlo and **Witherville**: places built around drawing coal from down below, and hounded by danger. Kentucky coal is abundant, but the mines are prone to firedamp: pockets of incendiary gas looking for the slightest reason to go up in flames. In conditions like these, with men working under **Barrow & Locke's** reckless leadership, disaster is inevitable.

The official story's that firedamp caused the explosion in Barlo, obliterating the mine and rendering it a ghost town. Firedamp doesn't explain what became of the men and boys who died in the explosion, or the **Things** that arise from Barlo's mine even now.

Witherville's a gateway to Kentucky's Pennyroyal region, a plateau west of the coalfield named for the wild mint that grows all over. It's here you'll find hills draped in trees and bluegrass, lakes and springs, sinkholes and caves in the middle of good farming land. Some of those caves are breathtaking, sure, but they're just as dangerous as the mines: you never know what you'll find when you venture down underground.

BARLO

Town is a generous word for what Barlo used to be: the **B&L No. 7 Coal Mine**, post office, dry goods store, church, bank, and school. Despite its location in the heart of Kentucky's eastern coalfields, Barlo was never bustling. Back then, it was a place where you kept your head down and kept to yourself, where folks were just trying to

survive the dangerous work of pulling coal from underground, where women never knew if their husbands—or their brothers, or their sons—would fall victim to a cave-in or a fire, and often there wasn't even a body to recover.

Whether or not it ever was a town, Barlo sure isn't one any longer. Not since the mine exploded in the summer of 1917, killing 62 hardworking men and boys. Everything went wrong after that. Here in Barlo, the explosion shook something loose **Underneath**—something better off left alone—and all those men cooked alive in the throat of the mountain weren't going to rest easy. They came back as Things, some missing limbs and some missing faces, stinking of methane and sulfur, still on fire. They burned Barlo to the ground, and they're looking for more fuel to set alight.

Barrow & Locke moved on to Witherville; no mining disaster has ever stopped B&L, not as long as there's coal under Appalachia and men desperate enough to dig for it. Now the schoolhouse and the shacks out by **Goshun Creek** are the only buildings left standing. It's in the schoolhouse where you'll find **Bartholomew**, a creature of the Green who often takes the shape of a bear or a man and fights off the Things that crawl out of the old mine before their hunger for vengeance takes them into any of the bigger towns over the mountain.

AROUND BARLO

Barlo's streets are muddy tracks, slick with rain and ash. Rain, because **the Green** pours down Kentucky summer storms to extinguish the Things from Barlo's mine whenever too many climb up out of the ground. Ash, because the Things stiffen, cool, and dissolve into gray powder when

If you're a player, stop right here and check with the GM before reading any further, just in case they want to keep some of this secret for now.

Witherville, page 206

Barrow & Locke, page 193

Underneath: see the Inner Dark, page 188

Things from Barlo's Mine, page 204

Goshun Creek, page 205

Bartholomew, page 384

B&L No. 7 Coal Mine, page 204

The Green, page 188



B&L No. 7 is still burning, and sulfurous smoke comes up through vent shafts and fissures in the ground throughout the region.

Thing from Barlo's mine:
level 3; health 9; attacks by grappling a target or touching an object; inflicts 3 points of damage from heat; flammable objects that come into contact with the Thing are set on fire

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines.

they're covered in water. The Green's reclaimed the burned ruins of what used to be the town square and the homes around it, covering them in vines and branches. If not for the ramshackle schoolhouse, newcomers might not even know they've reached Barlo's remains.

The **Things from the mine** can't cross running water, so the few families who have stuck around live on the opposite side of Goshun Creek. Most of Barlo's visitors—those who aren't just passing through on their way to someplace else—come looking for Granny Tyler by the creek. Venturing down into the still-smoldering mine and breathing in the foul smoke will keep you young and healthy, as long as you pay Granny Tyler a visit first.

ARRIVING IN BARLO

The train used to come to the mine—up the road a ways and around the mountain—not to Barlo proper. It still passes through,

but it doesn't stop at the B&L No. 7 coal mine; it hasn't had a reason to since 1917. The only way to get to Barlo by rail is train hopping, and road travel isn't much easier. The southbound road that leads into town has fallen into disrepair, the blacktop riddled with potholes and grown over with creeping kudzu.

B&L NO. 7 COAL MINE

The coal mine is about a mile north of Barlo, with the main entrance across a narrow dirt road from the train tracks. It's not much to look at from the outside, just a wooden overhang with a faded sign marking the tunnel entrance. The real wealth—and the real horror—lie underground.

The mines run deep, miles of tunnels that wind back on themselves. The labyrinth is full of bad air from the fire, and one misstep is all it takes to awaken the **dead men** still burning where they fell. Still, every so often a visitor will take a chance and delve

down into Barlo's heart. Rumor has it that breathing in the smoke will heal whatever ails you, as long as you do **Granny Tyler's ritual** first.

THE SCHOOLHOUSE

Barlo's schoolhouse is a one-room building with a collapsed roof and copperheads lurking under the floorboards. It's also the only building in Barlo proper that hasn't been burned to its foundations and blanketed in new growth. Inside, you'll find the chalkboards, desks, and chairs just as the students left them in 1917. You might also find **Bartholomew**.

See, Bartholomew is a creature of the **Green**, and he visits Barlo every couple of weeks to make sure the Things from the mine haven't spread too far. He's most likely to be in the form of a bear, but he'll appear as a man if kindly approached. He might even ask for help: he's looking for someone brave and skilled enough to venture into the mine and lay a binding, a spell to contain the darkness that the explosion set free, magic that'll put out the fire for good.

GOSHUN CREEK

Back when Barlo was Barlo, most folks stayed away from Goshun Creek—a slow trickle of water on the far side of town from the mine entrance—because it smells foul on account of sulfur venting from the mine into the water. Nowadays, the stretch of shacks and shanties along the creek are the only structures still standing (excepting the schoolhouse) because the creek keeps the Things out: those smoldering, vengeful men and boys can't cross running water. Which is why the Tyler family and what's left of the Crawford family still live alongside the creek, even though the rest of Barlo is long gone.

THE TYLER FAMILY

The Tyler Family is led by **Granny Tyler**. She's a healer who'll tell stories that range back to the last century, but her youthful face and vibrant red hair make her age impossible to guess. She swears that breathing in the smoke from old No. 7 keeps you youthful and healthy, curing any injury or ailment, as long as you conduct a ritual first. Granny Tyler keeps the details of the ritual to herself, but

will perform it in exchange for five dollars and all the necessary components: a living field mouse, three iron nails, a tallow candle, and a pint of moonshine. What Granny Tyler doesn't know is that her youth and health, regained after repeated exposure to that foul smoke, is a favor from the **Inner Dark**. Some day the cost will come due, not only for herself but also for everyone she's sent down into the mine in search of healing.

The shack next to Granny Tyler's is home to her son and his husband, **Emmanuel** and **Lionel**. The young couple primarily helps Granny Tyler with her ritual, though they're skilled in a few workings of their own. Emmanuel can cure warts or hives just by touching them, and Lionel is especially good at breaking curses. Emmanuel worked at the No. 7 Mine, along with his two older brothers who have since moved away, and he'll tell you the truth about how he survived the explosion: the miners were on strike when the disaster happened, and all those men and boys that burned alive were strikebreakers brought in by B&L. Emmanuel and his brothers would never even think about crossing a picket line; hell, they didn't even cross Goshun Creek into Barlo proper once the mine started to spit out smoke. The strength of their convictions kept them alive on that day.

VERITY CRAWFORD

The Crawford family came to Barlo in 1917 looking for work and set up in one of the rundown shanties alongside Goshun Creek. Sure, the men were scabs, but it's not like there was an abundance of work for Black men. They did what they had to do to make a living, and that living didn't last.

Now **Verity Crawford** is the only one left, after losing her husband, brother, and three sons in the No. 7 Mine. She's stayed right here in Barlo because she has no other family, nowhere else to go—and she knows the Things that call out to her from across the creek on the night of the new moon aren't really her little boys, but she couldn't possibly leave them all alone and scared.

Verity knows Barlo's union men were angry at the scabs. She remembers the dirty looks in town in the days leading up to the disaster, and the threat that Barrow & Locke leadership would get involved—and she

Characters who complete Granny Tyler's ritual are restored to full health upon entering the mine.

The Inner Dark, page 188

Emmanuel Tyler: level 3, navigates the No. 7 Mine as level 5; health 15; can cure warts or hives by touching the affected area for ten seconds

Lionel Tyler: level 3, detects and breaks curses as level 5; health 15

Bartholomew, page 384
The Green, page 188

Verity Crawford: level 3; perception, persuasion, and investigation as level 5

Granny Tyler: level 4; health 20; can perform a three-hour magical ritual that allows a person to safely breathe in the No. 7 Mine for a day and restores all health if the creature enters the mine

BARLO HUSHED MURMURS

WHERE THE WATER RUNS

A sinkhole has opened up under Goshun Creek, swallowing up Catherine Downs's home and diverting the flow of water underground. What's worse, a pack of red dogs have risen up from the crater below, and they're looking for fuel to burn.

Red dog, page 372

Goshun Creek, page 205

*B&L No. 7 Coal Mine,
page 204*

FROM WITHERVILLE

Lex Marsh was the assistant foreman at B&L No. 7—on leave at the time of the explosion—and moved on to Witherville after the disaster made Barlo useless to Barrow & Locke. He lost a golden locket,

handed down from his dear mother, and the last place he *knows* he had it was in Barlo. He needs someone to delve down into the mine to find it.

NEW FOLK

Barlo doesn't get new folk too often—at least, not anyone looking to stay. But now everyone living over at Goshun Creek is puzzled by the newest residents: distant relatives of one of the player characters have moved into the vacant shacks, looking for something in the old mine, and they've written to the PC to ask for help.

thinks that the fire that killed her family was set on purpose. She just needs help proving it. All the evidence she'd gathered was destroyed last month when someone broke into her home, but Verity wasn't intimidated. If anything, she's twice as determined.

train line and Witherville's railroad spur, you'll find the Rowland & Rowland big top in an overgrown bluegrass field.

AROUND WITHERVILLE

WITHERVILLE

Witherville sits at the very edge of Kentucky's eastern coalfield, and it started out as a coal camp, with miners and their families, a church, a school, and a company store. But these days, it's a boomtown of about 700 residents and counting, in the process of outgrowing itself.

The entrance to the B&L No. 9 coal mine is right alongside the railroad spur, which runs back to the main track that parallels the highway, north into Ohio and south into *Tennessee*. The miners' clapboard homes spread west of the mine toward the town square; the houses are all squished together, and the square is cramped on account of not much space being left for new buildings. The square hosts the church, the school, the hospital, and the company store. New additions include Witherville's town hall, which was built once the town incorporated, and the inn, established to accommodate tourists drawn here for the circus or the caves.

East of the railroad tracks is farmland speckled with magnificent caves, including the *Sterling family's* patch of corn and soybean fields. And in the crook of the main

B&L NO. 9 COAL MINE

Kentucky's coal is bituminous, meaning that it's the worst for firedamp—flammable gas building up in underground pockets, liable to catch fire or even explode in the wrong conditions. Firedamp's what got those men in *Barlo* (at least, that's how the official story goes), and it's gotten a fair number of Witherville's miners: burned 'em up until nothing recognizable remains. When men die in B&L No. 9, all that's buried in the little cemetery behind the church are their headlamp and work boots.

After the explosion in Barlo killed his boss, *Lex Marsh* was promoted to foreman of Witherville's mine. Lex was a shift supervisor at *Avalon*, another mine that ended in fiery disaster, and it shows. He's a cruel taskmaster with no sympathy for sickness or injury, and he has all the recklessness with human life that led those other mines to ruin. The way Lex sees it, he's responsible for safety and compliance with B&L company policy; he has a quota of how many men and boys he can afford to lose in the mines, and he comes in well under it. He's been working with B&L for the better part of twenty years, and he's tired of running remote coal camps, so he's gunning for a position at the home office in *Barrow*.

Barlo, page 203

Tennessee, page 226

Lex Marsh: level 4; persuasion, deception, and intimidation as level 5; all tasks related to magic as level 3

Avalon, page 197

Though Lex Marsh doesn't know it, no one but the Barrow family and their immediate, high-ranking assistants work out of the home office.

Sterling Cave, page 209

Barrow, page 194

He's been led to believe that if B&L No. 9 is productive enough, he just might get his way—and the miners that get hurt or killed along the way are disposable.

With a boss as single-minded as Lex, and a mine as prone to accidents as this one, it's just a matter of time before a fire starts that can't be put out. It only takes a spark.

WITHERVILLE HOSPITAL

It used to be that the nearest doctor was two hours away, and Witherville Hospital stood vacant. Now **Dr. Ashland**'s settled in the ramshackle one-story hospital building, but visiting him is seen as a last resort. There's nothing wrong with the new doctor on the outside—he's a perfectly friendly and knowledgeable man—but if you see him in the sunlight, his shadow is just a touch bigger and slower than it ought to be. And the way he does medicine is . . . odd, just as likely to kill you as it is to save you.

Dr. Herbert Ashland was an amateur caver over on Tennessee's side of the **Cumberland Plateau**, until he fell down a narrow shaft and broke his spine. He was down there in the freezing darkness for days, just waiting to die. That **darkness** made him an offer: *I'll keep you alive, if you live to serve me.* The doctor was delirious with cold and pain, and no one was coming to save him—wouldn't you accept a deal like that, in his place?

Now, Dr. Ashland anoints his patients with his own blood, drawn from a needle prick in the pad of his thumb. He stands over them, speaking a language unknown to man, and he waits. Sometimes his patients are cured, made whole and brand new. Most of the time—even if all that brought them to the hospital was a knee that aches when it rains—all he guarantees them is a painless death.

WITHERVILLE TOWN HALL

The town hall is a drafty clapboard building that doubles as the jail and courthouse. Though Barrow & Locke no longer runs Witherville as a coal camp, the local government is drawn from B&L top brass. Moving to Witherville was the closest **Judge Wedge**, an ancient man who used to work as an accountant in the Barrow home office, cared to get to retirement. The judge doesn't know how to stop working, doesn't care to learn, and won't hesitate to take a case to

trial if it offers a reprieve from the boredom he's prone to. That's the reason **Tess the elephant** got a murder trial, even though the defense couldn't testify: to entertain Judge Wedge. The spectators who packed into the small building to witness the judge's verdict were a side effect, and have only encouraged him to be more litigious. Trials are public, theatrical affairs, used to settle even the smallest disputes. Folks have taken to joking that Witherville doesn't need a cinema—why pay for a movie, when you can spend an afternoon at town hall?

WITHERVILLE INN

Witherville Inn is a shoddy one-story building that cropped up to accommodate folks traveling into town for the circus or the caves. The inn looks small from the outside, but the expansive dimensions of the interior don't match the building's shape. Most folk don't believe the owner, **Rusty Marion**, when they say that this is because rooms appear and disappear according to need. Rusty keeps a **magic slate** in a lockbox behind the front desk, and drawing or erasing rooms from the floor plan changes the inn's physical layout. They can keep maintenance and heating costs down without having to turn away a tourist with a full wallet looking for a place to sleep.

That's not the only magic Rusty's capable of. They can bend the truth by drawing in chalk, but they can't directly harm anyone with this power—which is awfully inconvenient, seeing as Rusty's little son died in B&L No. 9 and they're looking for revenge.

ROWLAND & ROWLAND CIRCUS

Rowland & Rowland Circus sprung up in the bluegrass meadow beside the railroad spur overnight, like mushrooms after rain. Folks went to sleep knowing that the field was empty, and awoke to the news that a fifteen-car circus had come in on the train tracks boasting clowns, trapeze swingers, tigers, and an elephant all the way from India. A parade led by Tess the elephant herself went through Witherville for those who hadn't heard the good news: delights await you under the big top, three days only, get your tickets, folks!

The Ghost of Traitorous Tess, page 208

Dr. Herbert Ashland:
level 5, deception as level 6

Rusty Marion: level 5; once per day, can draw a scene with chalk that then comes true; this power cannot be used to cause direct harm to a living being

Cumberland Plateau, page 242

Magic slate: artifact, level 4; on each use, a character can draw Witherville Inn's floor plan on the slate in chalk, and the interior of the inn will reflect the drawing; come due: 1 in 1d100

The Inner Dark, page 188

Admission to the Rowland & Rowland Circus is 20 cents.

Carlton Wedge: level 3, public speaking as level 4

Rusty Marion, page 207

Tess the elephant: level 6; usually incorporeal and harmless, but becomes corporeal for one hour a week at random; trampling attack deals 6 points of damage; responds to direction from Rusty Marion; offering Tess fresh squash eases positive social interaction tasks to influence her

Circus performers: level 3, performance and one circus skill as level 4

Felicia Sterling, page 211

Bigsby: level 5; health 20; Armor 1

Lex Marsh, page 206

Barrow, page 194

Bartleby Rowland: level 3; performance, public speaking, and persuasion as level 4

Covington Rowland: level 3; logic, arithmetic, and persuasion as level 4

Paradise, page 250

Then Tess betrayed Old Basco, the handler who'd practically raised her, and was subsequently tried for murder and sentenced to death by hanging—a spectacle that the Rowlands were more than happy to capitalize on, seeing as they'd lost their biggest star. Now Rowland & Rowland keep extending their time in Witherville because audiences keep filling the stands, hoping to see Tess's ghost make an appearance.

THE GHOST OF TRAITOROUS TESS

Rusty Marion called Tess's ghost by drawing her in chalk the same day as her execution, and she's haunted the makeshift fairgrounds ever since. Most of the time, the audience sees her outline parading around the arena while the other circus acts perform; she's an afterimage, so subtle that she could be a trick of the light. But sometimes, Tess stomps through Witherville, squishing people who do bad things. Her first victim was Alastair Sterling, Pop Sterling's heir and an all-around good-for-nothing, prone to dragging his wife Felicia through the house by the hair when he'd had too much bourbon. When the circus first arrived in Witherville, he threw pebbles at Tess as the parade went through town.

All that was left of Alastair's head was a bloody, elephant-sized footprint.

Tess has her own list of folks she wants revenge against, but she's loyal to Rusty—and she'll do favors for anyone who brings her squash while she's corporeal. Rusty saw Tess trample Old Basco and wants to train her ghost to squish every B&L worker responsible for the death of their son. That doesn't just mean Lex Marsh—no, Lex is a cruel man, but he's really just a pawn, and Rusty's got their sights set higher than that. They want to take Tess's ghost to Barrow and stomp all over the B&L home office.

THE ROWLANDS

Rowland & Rowland Circus is run by Bartleby Rowland and Covington Rowland, who aren't related but look startlingly similar: both are tall and fair-haired, with slender faces and thick reddish beards. Bartleby, the ringmaster, is from England and exaggerates his posh accent when performing. Covington is from Paradise and handles the business side of things. Both of

them love what they do—they consider their ragtag troupe their family—but they love making money even more. Tess trampling Old Basco was a tragedy, and so was Tess herself being executed. Both of these events spelled a certain loss of income, but the Rowlands have made the most of the hand they were dealt. They're content to extend their stay in Witherville for as long as audiences keep filling up the big top; if that means spreading what they see as sensationalized ghost stories, then so be it.

UNDER THE BIG TOP

Rowland & Rowland Circus boasts an extensive lineup of acts guaranteed to thrill audiences. Here are the most exciting and memorable performers:

- Gorgo and Mormo are two clowns, one of whom enters the tent in colorful garb and one of whom starts the act wearing black and white. Over the course of their performance, the color is leached out of the colorful clown and the monochrome clown becomes a rainbow of hues.
- The Belmarez Flyers are a family of five who perform a death-defying trapeze act.
- Madame Zakharova is a bearded lady who sings jazz standards.
- Ollie Sands is a massive bald man who performs feats of strength.
- The Stoltman Twins are a pair of identical contortionists who are adept at escaping from small spaces.
- Bigsby is an 800-pound (360 kg) tiger who jumps through hoops of fire. He's tended to by his handler, Stevie, who joined the circus after Old Basco's death.

WITHERVILLE'S CAVE WARS

Some Appalachian caves are creepy, wet places full of fungus and critters adapted to life in the dark. Some are massive chambers of crystalline stalactites and pillars, natural beauty waiting to be illuminated. Some are a bit of both.

The Sterling Cave is a show cave: a massive chamber that hosts visitors for expeditions, with admission costing 25 cents. For a long time, Pop Sterling did a modest business, drawing the occasional tourist with the signs he'd placed on the highway, but things really took off once the circus got to town.



Now Witherville's got tons of people traveling in and out, looking to see something spectacular—and an afternoon spent caving is the perfect prelude to an evening in the circus tent.

While the entrance to Sterling Cave is on Pop Sterling's property, there's no way of proving who owns the cave itself—and the cave network is extensive. Lots of farmers outside of Witherville have cave entrances on their land that they never thought twice about. Thing is, *now* those entrances might prove lucrative, if they connect to Sterling Cave. Farmers like **Jewel Shaw** are delving underground looking for alternate routes to Sterling Cave, so that they can charge a cheaper entry fee and poach Pop Sterling's business. But while Sterling Cave is a pretty, friendly cave, the same isn't true of all those other offshoots. Not all spelunking is safe, and not everything that lives underground can be trusted.

STERLING CAVE

Pop Sterling knew he'd found something marvelous—and profitable—as soon as he discovered the cave entrance at the far end of one of his cornfields. Sterling Cave is a chamber bigger than the Rowland & Rowland Circus tent, full of white and pink crystal formations that glimmer in lantern light. Pop Sterling's father gave him a geode when he was a boy, an ordinary rock that cracks in half to reveal gleaming minerals, and that's the best comparison he's found for Sterling Cave: doesn't look like much from the outside, but the inside is breathtaking. If you pay for a tour, Pop Sterling will show you the cave entrance and encourage you to carve your initials into the stone just inside; then he'll give you a lantern and leave you to take in the natural wonders for an hour or so.

He started selling tickets right away, with his son Alastair helping him give tours and put signs out along the highway. Business was slow, but Pop Sterling was just happy to show off this hidden wonder. It was too special, he said, for him to keep

Pop Sterling: level 3; persuasion, storytelling, and business operations as level 4

The cave system under Witherville cuts all the way through to Porter Cave (page 243) in Tennessee, but this expedition isn't for the faint of heart.

Jewel Shaw: level 4; carries a lantern, a pickaxe, and a length of rope



WITHERVILLE HUSHED MURMURS

TO JOIN THE CIRCUS

Years ago, a player character's loved one ran away to join the Rowland & Rowland Circus. Now, when the PC asks after them, the other circus performers have never heard of them, and Covington Rowland seems to dodge the question.

Covington Rowland, page 208

B&L No. 9, page 206

Dr. Ashland, page 207

PIG BONES

Elijah Joyce, a local farmer, lowered one of his pigs into the cave shaft on his property to see what was down there. When he pulled the rope back up, all that remained was a picked-clean skeleton. Now he's looking for a way to placate and bind whatever's under his land.

A GOOD DOCTOR

Fifteen-year-old Clay Best got his lower leg crushed when a tunnel collapsed in B&L No. 9. Now his mom and sister are looking for someone to tend to him, seeing as they're both afraid of Dr. Ashland.

to himself. Alastair married **Felicia** and the two of them kept helping out with the cave business. Felicia was interested in the narrow passageways that led off the main chamber, but Alastair convinced her that a woman had no business exploring uncharted caves. Could've just been that Alastair was too cowardly to explore for himself, but that doesn't matter now that Alastair's dead and Felicia is missing.

So no one paid much attention to the side caves, until **Jewel Shaw** from the next farm over started helping out with cave tours—and then that traitor went home to his own land and began figuring out alternate routes to Sterling Cave, charging only 20 cents to see *his* cave. Pop Sterling took this as a declaration of war, and now the two men are locked in a rivalry, and it seems like every other day another farmer finds a new cave that could lead back to Sterling's. It's those side caves you've really got to worry about: not all of the caves under Witherville are safe, and not all of the critters found underground are friendly.

ELSEWHERE UNDER WITHERVILLE

The smaller caves that lead to Sterling Cave are cold, wet, and connected by narrow passages—the kind of gap that you have to squeeze or crawl through. Here are some boons and hazards you might encounter while exploring under Witherville:

- An underground lake of blind, translucent **crayfish** that feed on human flesh, using ripples in the water to detect their prey.
- A sump: a passage that is completely submerged in standing water, such that the dry areas to either side can only be accessed by a short swim.
- **Falling rocks**, disturbed by the movement of the train above.
- Odorous tar bubbling up through the rock that, if touched, is impossible to wash off for a full day.
- A cavern of comatose **bats** the size of a human palm that inflict bad luck on whoever wakes them.
- A nest of **lucky salamanders** feasting on residue from the **Inner Dark** that seeps through the limestone.

- A pillar of sludgy black coal and a pocket of firedamp, where the cave system runs close to B&L No. 9.
- The sound of young children playing, with no discernible source.

THE HERMIT

Maybe it's because she was driven mad by grief, or maybe it's because her late husband always stopped her from spelunking. Either way, **Felicia Sterling** disappeared down one of the passageways off of Sterling Cave three weeks ago and hasn't been seen since. The food Pop Sterling leaves for her disappears overnight, and Jewel Shaw says he's heard her moving around in the tunnels, but no one's been able to lure her back to the surface.

Wilson and Toby Fisher, two kids from a nearby farm, say they saw Felicia while they were playing in the shallow cave entrance on their family's land. The boys report that the cave has somehow changed Felicia: her hair is covered with speckled blue fungus, and her skin has gone as translucent as the creatures that dart around the underground pools. The way she moved wasn't quite right either—she slithered up through a crack in the ground, more like a cave critter than a human.

Felicia Sterling: level 3, Might- and Speed-based tasks as level 4

Jewel Shaw, page 209

Exploring the cave system is a great time to use What Wakes Mode (page 297), with each encounter increasing the range of numbers that trigger a GM intrusion.

Flesh-eating crayfish swarm: level 2, attacks as a level 4 creature; claws and bites inflict 5 points of damage

Falling rocks: level 6; inflicts 6 points of damage

Dreaming bats: level 1; whoever awakens them increases their GM intrusion range by 1 for the next day

Lucky salamanders, page 242
The Inner Dark, page 188

Chapter 13: NORTH CAROLINA

If you're a player, stop right here and check with the GM before reading any further, just in case they want to keep some of this secret for now.

Momma Mazey, page 218

Railroad: see Tweetsie, page 193

Barrow & Locke, page 193

Avery County, page 219

Tennessee, page 226

Virginia, page 245

North Carolina is farming country—half of the state's people live on farms, working the red clay soil for tobacco, corn, and rice—but most of that happens out on the eastern plains, which doesn't much concern us. Our story is that of the Blue Ridge, the oldest and deadliest neck of these old and deadly mountains, and all the misguided ways men have tried to bind what lives in the ground below. Some, like the residents of Boone, have convinced themselves that they've succeeded.

The **East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad** spans the state line, transporting iron ore from the **Barrow & Locke** mines in **Avery County** to **Tennessee** in one direction and to **Boone** in the other. **Barrow & Locke's** rail service travels north from **Boone** into **Virginia**, carrying both passengers and freight.

BOONE

If Appalachian North Carolina were a body, Boone would be its heart, sitting snug between the ribs of the Blue Ridge Mountains. This small, rugged town has become the region's economic center, largely due to its position at the juncture of the Tweetsie and Barrow & Locke train lines. Boone connects the logging camps and steel mills in Tennessee, iron mines in Avery County and farms on North Carolina's eastern plains, and Barrow & Locke's mines to the north and west.

All 1,000 of Boone's residents are packed into the town's bustling center—and where overlapping lives pile on top of each other, whispers are bound to rise up, often exacerbated by the rotating cast of visitors. Most of these visitors arrive by train, either the B&L rail from the north or the

East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad—lovingly known as Tweetsie—from the west.

No matter where you're coming from, gossips like **Momma Mazey**, the mayor's wife, fill you in on your neighbor's (and your neighbor's neighbor's) business in exchange for a favor, such as carrying her groceries or shoveling snow off her walkway. There's one thing you'd best keep in mind, though: just as quickly as Momma Mazey will tell you about a neighbor's domestic squabbles, or who's expecting a new baby come springtime, or who's in danger of defaulting on a loan, she'll pass your secrets along just the same.

While mining and rail conglomerate Barrow & Locke has spread like rot up and down Appalachia, their presence in Boone is mostly limited to the Locke Railroad Company train line, which ends at Boone's rail depot. That doesn't mean Boone is safe from the uncanny things that lurk in our hills. After all, B&L's far from the only thing you've got to be wary of. Around here, there's always someone new passing through town, or stopping over as part of a longer journey, or venturing to town from farther out in

WHAT THE GM NEEDS TO KNOW

There are two big things going on in Boone. The first is the trial of Denny Snow for the murder of his family, which you can find explained under **What Happened to Denny Snow?** The second is a series of killings where the victims are found with their hearts removed, which you can find explained under **Arley Blackwell**.

What Happened to Denny Snow?, page 215

Arley Blackwell, page 218

Watauga County to shop for something special. While all travelers are welcome in Boone, not everyone has the best intentions at heart.

And some may not have a heart at all.

TWEET TWEET

Tweetsie's whistle is audible from basically anywhere in town; some folk find it annoying, but most are deeply comforted by the sound. That *tweet tweet*, accompanied by the clatter of wheels on rails, means *home*. It means *safe*. The Blue Ridge Mountains are older than man can fathom, dangerous and wild, but Tweetsie means that we've tamed this land, and nothing can harm us here—at least, that's what people around here like to say when they catch themselves flinching at shadows, or reassuring their children that the movement outside their bedroom window's just a trick of the light.

AROUND BOONE

BOONE HOTEL

Nearly everyone showing up in Boone—whether they arrive by Tweetsie, by Locke rail, by car, or on foot—is likely to stay at Boone Hotel, especially if they're here on business. Here's where you go if you need to track down someone passing through town or get your bearings if it's your first time in Boone. Any of the employees can tell you the best place to have a meal, get your car repaired, attend a worship service, or anything else you might need.

The hotel is a tall wooden building with a rattling cage elevator, and its small team of cooks and housekeepers are run with military precision by **Paige Booth**, an upright older woman who never forgets a face. Paige wears her thin, graying hair in a practical knot and is rarely seen without an apron, even when she's attending the hotel's front desk. Paige is responsible for keeping up the hotel's ledger and guestbook—both are straightforward leather-bound journals, with additional notes on guests' comings and goings written in her secret code in the back pages.

Right now, Boone Hotel's most famous boarder is **Lum Enoch**, a newspaper man here all the way from Asheville to report on the town's biggest murder trial, that of one **Denny Snow**.

BOONE COURTHOUSE

Boone's is the only courthouse in **Watauga County**, so cases from the surrounding towns are tried here as well. Even when there's not a big murder trial going on, **Mayor Stubbs** and **Sheriff McLeod** have way more to do than two men—even two driven, passionate men—can handle.

Trials are always open to the public, but none have drawn a crowd quite so hungry as the one for Denny Snow. Denny's not one of Boone's own—no one from around here would do something as vile as he did. No, Denny's from way out in Watauga County, near the Avery County line, and we don't claim him around these parts. How could we, after he killed his family like a farmer slaughtering livestock? His mother, his father, his brother, his wife. All of them smothered in their sleep and cut up still in their beds, and Denny didn't even try to deny that he'd done it.

Whole families pack into the courthouse balcony each day to hear the goriest details as the trial drags on. Crowds of men, most of 'em drunk on the cheapest choice from **Morse's**, turn up every night demanding that Denny be turned loose from the jail so that they can kill him themselves. People who didn't know Denny claim that they did, and that there was always something crooked about him. People who *did* know Denny act like they've never met him, just in case that kind of evil can spread like a sickness. To keep things running smoothly, Sheriff McLeod's looking to hire more guards for the jail and the courthouse until the chaos from the trial's died down.

Aside from Denny Snow's trial, the sheriff and the officers under his purview are hard at work trying to solve a series of more recent murders in Boone proper, friends and neighbors turning up dead and with their hearts missing. It would've been easy enough to pin the attacks on Denny—until Stokely Woodward was found at **Boone Auto Repair** with his chest torn open, *after* Denny'd turned himself in.

Boone is the largest town in Watauga County, which borders Tennessee to the west and Avery County to the southwest. This lonely county at North Carolina's western edge is separated from the rest of the state by steep mountains.

Mayor Stubbs, page 218

Sheriff McLeod: level 4; carries a pistol that inflicts 5 points of damage

Tweetsie runs from Boone through Avery County (page 219) and into Tennessee, while the B&L line goes north. Tweetsie fare is \$20 to traverse the entire line, and B&L fare is \$30 for passage into Virginia.

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines.

Boone prides itself on being welcoming, and Tweetsie is part and parcel of the town's character.

Morse's, page 214

Paige Booth: level 3; deciphering her encoded notes is a level 5 Intellect task

Boone Auto Repair, page 214

Lum Enoch: level 2, storytelling and intimidation as level 4; carries a gold-nibbed fountain pen and a stenographer's pad full of notes written in shorthand

Denny Snow, page 215



BOONE ATLAS

See Around Boone on page 213 for more information on many of these locations.

1. **RAIL DEPOT**
2. **BOONE AUTO REPAIR**
3. **BOONE HOTEL**
4. **DAYLIGHT CINEMA**
Daylight Cinema has one screen and plays silent double features on Friday evenings, as well as matinee showings on Saturdays.
5. **POST OFFICE**
As Boone residents have to visit the post office to request their mail, this small building is one of the town's social hubs, allowing folks to turn an errand into a chance to catch up with friends.
6. **WATAUGA BANK**
7. **BOONE HOSPITAL**
8. **CLEGG'S GROCERY**
9. **BOONE LUTHERAN CHURCH**
Boone's Lutherans say that their rituals are the only true ones, but they're just as likely to turn to magic as any of the rest of us—they just might be a bit more secretive about it, is all.
10. **BOONE COURTHOUSE**
11. **BOONE JAIL**
12. **HOWARD METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**
Howard Methodist Episcopal is Boone's oldest church, and the building—a monstrosity of stone and stained glass—has remained the same for a century.
13. **WATAUGA BAPTIST CHURCH**
14. **DAWE'S HIDE SHOP**
15. **FEED & FERTILIZER**
This feed and fertilizer shop mainly serves farmers who live outside of Boone, making their living off the rocky land. A few Boone residents—the oldest families, the ones that have a scrap of land to spare in spite of how crowded the town's gotten—shop here for supplies for their chicken coops and small gardens.
16. **SCHOOLHOUSE**
When the train passes by during recess, the kids in the schoolyard crowd up against the fence, cheering and waving until the conductor blows the whistle.
17. **RED HEN BAKERY**
18. **JEM'S LUMBER**
19. **MORSE'S**
Morse's speakeasy welcomes everyone who knows the secret password, residents and visitors to Boone alike—and it's not like the password's changed in twenty years.
20. **THE HILL**
21. **HOWARD HOUSE**

WHAT HAPPENED TO DENNY SNOW?

Denny Snow lived with his family on a small homestead 7 miles south of Boone. It's the kind of beautiful, hidden place that you might stumble upon once in these mountains, then have a hard time finding again later on unless you know exactly what you're looking for. The kind of land that can be impossible to make a living on, unless you've placated it with generations of sacrifice. The Snow family put everything they had into that homestead, and the land paid them back with bounty and safety.

So Denny wasn't in the habit of questioning what the woods gave him. When he was out hunting last winter and a **buck** practically walked right into him, Denny didn't hesitate. He thanked the deer for

giving its life, and he took the meat home to his family.

Nothing much went right after that. Denny took to wandering in his sleep, waking up in the woods in his nightclothes carrying a hunting knife. When it got real bad, Denny went to Boone Hospital for help, but not even **Mrs. Stafford** and her remedies—lavender, valerian, chamomile, magnolia—could keep him in his bed. In the small hours of the night, it was like his body wasn't his own.

He may have confessed to the crime, but it wasn't *him* that killed his family. It was whatever comes over him around midnight. It was whatever's been haunting him since he killed that buck.

Denny Snow: level 4;
level 7 when sleepwalking

Mrs. Stafford, page 217

Denny's affliction comes from killing and butchering a not deer (page 369). The same forces of the Inner Dark that turn those deer into something backward and wrong have gotten into him; at night, when his defenses are weaker, the Inner Dark acts through him.



Nathaniel Hooper: level 3, deception and intimidation as level 5; pistol inflicts 5 points of damage; carries several cigarettes in an engraved metal case

Enoch Esquivel: level 3, gambling as level 5; pistol inflicts 5 points of damage; carries several dice and a deck of cards

Deacon Finnegan: level 2, sums and figures as level 5, perception as level 1

Mayor Stubbs, page 218
Momma Mazey, page 218

Denny Snow, page 215

Every night, ghosts rummage through the papers on Deacon's desk; he says it's the wind, and that he must've forgotten to close the window. Those ghosts are folks who died with money or heirlooms in lockboxes at Watauga Bank, trying to make sure that the absent-minded manager gets their assets to their next of kin.

Bank ghosts: level 2, stealth as level 4

Harris James: level 2

Walt Stafford: level 3, repairs machines and vehicles as level 5; carries a small folding multitool

Tilly James: level 4

Characters who eat Tilly's newest batch of muffins recall ten seconds of their saddest, loneliest memory.

BOONE JAIL

Boone's jail contains five cells and is overseen by guards around the clock. Those guards have been working in shifts of two lately, just to keep an eye on Denny Snow, but it seems like the new boys don't always keep their eyes up. **Hooper** and **Esquivel** were sitting watch late on a Friday night—more likely having a smoke or playing cards—when they heard a slow dripping from one of the cells, like water. When they made their rounds, they found that the sound was a trickle of blood: Albie Skinner, who'd been brought in the night before for stealing a horse, was found with his chest split open and his heart torn out.

WATAUGA BAPTIST CHURCH

Watauga Baptist holds services every Sunday morning, with a prayer meeting on Wednesday evening. This congregation—which includes **Mayor Stubbs** and **Momma Mazey**—is the largest in Boone, and closely knit in spite of its size.

But Watauga Baptist is given to infighting since **Denny Snow** did what he did, because this was his church. He sat in these pews with his family and prayed along with the rest of us, and look at what kind of man he turned out to be. Not the kind of evil that comes from the untamed mountains, but an evil that's even more ordinary, perhaps even more chilling, because it was a choice.

And if one of our own can make a choice like that, how are we supposed to trust each other now?

BOONE AUTO REPAIR

Run by **Walt Stafford**, an older man with sparse hair and a thick mustache ten years out of fashion, Boone Auto Repair is a no-frills mechanic shop offering vehicle maintenance of all types at reasonable prices. The shop also serves as Boone's primary fueling station, with two fuel pumps facing Depot Street.

A couple weeks back, when Walt arrived around sunup to start working, he saw someone slumped over against one of those fuel pumps. "We get all kinds of people through here, this close to the depot," he thought. "Maybe we ought to put up a fence around the whole lot." But what he'd taken for a drunk sleeping off too much

moonshine, or maybe someone riding the rails and down on their luck, turned out to be the lifeless body of Boone's own Stokely Woodward—with a hole where its heart should be. Walt ran and got Sheriff McLeod, then Mrs. Woodward, Stokely's mother. Walt fought on the front lines in the Great War, but telling Mrs. Woodward that her son had been killed was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do.

WATAUGA BANK

Most Boone residents handle their accounts at Watauga Bank, located at the corner of King Street and Depot Street. The offices on the upper floor look out over Boone Auto Repair, and the train station beyond. **Deacon Finnegan**, the bank's manager, was up in his office when Walt found the heartless body at his auto shop—but if you ask him, he was facing the other way and deep in his calculations, and didn't see anything at all out of the ordinary.

When it comes down to it, Deacon Finnegan, who stands out for his red hair and highly polished shoes, is most often found looking the other way. Whether it's folks missing loan payments and overdrafting accounts, or the menagerie of ghosts that linger in his office from sundown to sunup, Mr. Finnegan is a man gifted in choosing not to see what's going on in his periphery.

RED HEN BAKERY

This bakery and coffee shop is owned by **Harris James**, who's known by locals and visitors alike for his ever-expanding menu of pastries and other baked goods. He's a quiet man who's always willing to get into a new culinary experiment.

Harris's wife, **Tilly**, comes from a long line of witches who cook food imbued with memories: soup beans that taste like the first clear day of spring, cornbread that tastes like wading in the creek with your cousins as a knee-high kid. She asks almost everyone who comes into Red Hen to sample her newest project: Tilly's trying to make muffins that taste like kicking your feet up by the fire on a quiet, safe night—but all of her attempts have come out tasting bitter and melancholy instead.

BOONE HOSPITAL

Boone Hospital is a three-story brick building overseen by **Dr. Thatcher**, **Dr. Anderson**, and their assistant, **Mrs. Stafford**. The building consists of an operating theater, a morgue, the doctors' offices and living quarters, several private rooms for patients, and a basement laboratory where Mrs. Stafford compounds medications. She's a special asset to the hospital—and to Boone at large—because she doesn't come from a traditional medical background, but rather from a family of healers. Aside from what the good doctors see fit to prescribe, she also offers herbal solutions to break curses, and can offer insight into magical items.

The morgue has been used to store four of the heartless bodies discovered in the past year.

CLEGG'S GROCERY

Clegg's is a small, family-run grocery shop that sources seasonal produce from farmers on North Carolina's eastern plains. When farmers bring their goods to Boone for transport on the train, store owner **Jefferson Clegg** gets the first pick of the harvest. Jefferson's training his son, **Marlon**, to take over the grocery someday. For now, Marlon would rather work as a butcher than learn to balance the books. He knows how to break down a carcass, but he's not the best with numbers and is too impatient to learn. Marlon has a soft spot for Boone's stray cats, who line up in the alley behind Clegg's every night around sunset and start yowling for scraps. They're all feral, flea-bitten things—the kind of cat that'll sooner bite your hand than roll over and purr—but they've grown fat on the offal Marlon leaves out for them.

Marlon's taken to giving the cats the hearts first out of all the scraps, laughing to himself at a joke his father finds in poor taste. Hearts are going missing around here, ain't they? Who's to say the cats aren't the ones to blame? They've got a taste for that particular organ, after all.

DAWE'S HIDE SHOP

This fur and hide shop is run by **Norah Dawe**, who inherited the business from her parents. Dawe's sells a variety of leather and fur goods. Norah also takes commissions for custom pieces, if she's able to source the

required materials from her suppliers in the surrounding communities. Though no one listened to her at the time, she was the first to say—a whole year ago!—that the recent uptick of violence in Boone is the work of a single individual. She wants her town to be safe, sure, but she also wants the satisfaction of being believed: the pattern's clear as day, and hardly anyone else seems to see it.

On the third Friday of every month, Norah gets a delivery from a **tall man who wears a black cloak** no matter the weather: a tanned hide of a beast she's never been able to identify, an envelope of money, and specifications for a pair of shoes to be made from the leather. Norah has the shoes ready within a month whether they're brogues, boots, or loafers. The pay is good and Norah, while normally chatty and perceptive, knows when *not* to ask questions. But something's not right about the man, or about the leather he brings in, and Norah's beginning to wonder.

JEM'S LUMBER

This shop is on Back Street, across from the Tweetsie tracks. The lumber is processed in a high-ceilinged brick building and stored under tarps in the yard for sale. **Jem's** wares come from logging camps in Tennessee, carried through the Blue Ridge on the train. **Arley Blackwell**, the man responsible for overseeing those logging camps, often stops in Boone to inspect the merchandise he stakes his reputation on. And Arley and Jem? The two men have a cordial enough partnership, but they don't much get along outside of work. Arley is a private man who harbors a dark secret and, second only to **Paige Booth**, Jem knows the most about how Arley spends his time in Boone. Still, if you ask Jem, what Arley gets up to isn't any of his business, as long as the lumber he orders keeps arriving on time and in good condition.

It never happens when Arley's in Boone, but every so often Jem unloads a train car of lumber and finds something odd: a piece of wood that seems normal on the surface, but turns as soft as flesh when he tries to section and plane it. Sometimes the wood even bleeds, slow and sticky sap that smells like iron.

Dr. Thatcher: level 3, practicing medicine as level 5; specializes in setting broken bones and binding sprained joints

Dr. Anderson: level 3, practicing medicine as level 5; specializes in abnormalities of the internal organs

Mrs. Stafford: level 3; healing, understanding magic, and breaking curses as level 5

Man in the black cloak: level 4; he stole something from the Inner Dark that writhes beneath North Carolina's soil, and that darkness wants it back. The only way he's found to conceal his steps from Those Who Sleep Beneath is to wear shoes made from the hide of warded cattle, and the soles wear out quickly.

Warded leather: level 4; comes from cattle that are warded from the moment of their birth, right up to the slaughter; anything made from the leather gives +2 Armor; comes due 1 in 1d20

Jefferson Clegg: level 3; has friendly and professional connections to farmers all over North Carolina, and is an old friend of Jody McEntyre (page 224)

Marlon Clegg: level 3, bookkeeping as level 2; carries a leather case of steel knives, his most prized possessions

Jem Whittle: level 4; carries a small single-headed axe

Arley Blackwell, page 218

Paige Booth, page 213

Norah Dawe: level 3; perception, investigation, and leatherworking as level 4

Rev. Emmanuel Howard Jr.: level 3; leadership, persuasion, and protecting his flock as level 5

A shotgun house is a rectangular home about 12 feet (3.5 m) wide, with rooms arranged in a line.

Rutherford Stubbs: level 3, diplomacy as level 5; carries his lucky pocket watch

Rutherford Stubbs's lucky watch: level 3; a pocket watch with a mother-of-pearl inlay as level 5; gives the holder an asset on persuasion tasks; comes due 1 in 1d100

Momma Mazey: level 2; deception, persuasion, and magically making rumors true as level 5; can hear the voices of the dead faintly at all times, but the voices are amplified on the night of the new moon

Arley Blackwell: level 4, deception and persuasion as level 5; carries an ornate wooden cane with a long, narrow blade hidden in the handle (inflicts 4 points of damage); carries an anesthetic-doused rag; if a character is rendered unconscious, Arley uses the knife stored in his cane to attempt to steal their heart

Anesthetic: level 6; if inhaled, creature must succeed at a Might defense roll or fall unconscious for one minute. An affected creature can attempt a new Might defense roll each round to awaken early.

Whitestag Logging, page 238

THE HILL

The Hill was founded as a free Black community in the 1840s, when Emmanuel Howard Sr. worked with formerly enslaved folks to buy a parcel of land and set up a place of their own. Most of The Hill's residents trace their lineage back to the few founding families, but more have continued to emigrate over the years, especially right after the Civil War. The settlement gets its name for its place on the base of a steep mountain, across the Tweetsie tracks from Boone proper. Homes are small and narrow, built around a shared yard with a common firepit and chicken coop.

The Hill's not nearly big enough to be considered a town of its own, but there's some debate about whether it should be considered part of Boone. Boone's oldest families would sooner claim The Hill's land for their own than accept its people, while

residents of The Hill are of divided opinions as to how connected they feel to the town.

HOWARD HOUSE

On Sunday mornings, The Hill's residents pack into Reverend Emmanuel Howard Jr.'s small **shotgun house** for worship services full of dancing, shouting, and clapping. He hasn't told anyone, but Reverend Howard suspects that Momma Mazey has some kind of sinister effect over Boone, and believes that his prayers protect his congregation from coming under her control. The Reverend isn't practiced in magic, but he knows a thing or two about belief: sometimes you can believe in something so hard, so fiercely, that it becomes the truth. So though he has no proof that he's able to protect his people, he has to go on believing that it works.

WHO'S WHO IN BOONE

Here are a few more of Boone's residents and visitors:

MAYOR STUBBS

Rutherford Stubbs prides himself on his paternal relationship to the town. He encourages his constituents to call him Poppa, but in spite of his best efforts, the moniker hasn't stuck. Despite that, the town seems to like him for his emphasis on safety and protection—this is his fourth consecutive term as Boone's mayor, and he's up for reelection next year. His campaign strategy is to keep everyone calm and subdued, like normal—no need for rumors about madmen mutilating bodies or any such thing.

MOMMA MAZEY

Momma Mazey, Mayor Stubbs's wife, has a not-always-welcome tendency to meddle in everyone's business, and she somehow knows what you need before you come out and ask for it. Sometimes she knows what you need before you even know you need it.

What folks don't know about Momma Mazey is that she's been working powerful magic on the whole town: her rumors become true *because* she tells them, not the other way

around. Momma Mazey keeps a light touch with this power—she mostly uses it because she likes to feel useful, and genuinely loves being seen as a maternal presence by Boone's residents. And besides, there's no harm in taking care of folks. She keeps Boone's people safe under her wing, and that's where she intends for them to stay.

But the mayor's wife is a bit too hooked on the town's gratitude and adoration, insinuating herself into more and more people's lives—and now she's spread too thin, can't possibly deliver on all the promises she's made, and has no idea how to fix it.

ARLEY BLACKWELL

Arley Blackwell is a frequent visitor to Boone—he's usually here one week out of every four, though he doesn't keep a consistent schedule. He oversees several **logging camps** in Tennessee and conducts random inspections of product shipments on the Tweetsie freight cars, making notes in a little notebook that he never shares with anyone, with his cane tucked beneath his arm while he's writing. If folks ask for specifics of what he does, he waves them off, saying that he doesn't like to talk business in his leisure time.

BOONE HUSHED MURMURS

MISSING CHICKENS

Joey Washington is the newest member of Boone's police force, the youngest officer to serve in a long while, and the only officer from The Hill. He's also the only officer who seems to care that someone is stealing chickens from The Hill's communal coop, leaving tracks behind that look human—but far bigger than a man's got any right to be. It may not be as important as the flashier investigations the rest of the officers are focused on, but Joey is determined to track down the missing chickens.

INDEPENDENCE

Reverend Howard's eldest daughter, Jemma, is a twenty-two-year-old firebrand who never learned how *not* to speak her mind. Her father taught her a healthy respect for civic processes, but he also taught her

to stand up for what she believes in, and Jemma's determined to do both. She's working to get a new measure on the ballot in the upcoming election: independence for The Hill, as its own town with its own government. She needs help getting Boone residents to sign her petition before she presents it to Mayor Stubbs.

OFF THE RAILS

A Tweetsie engine derailed where the tracks cut across Back Street. The conductor slammed the brakes after a group of deer bolted onto the tracks, and the whole thing tipped over on the curve. The problem is, those deer were all walking on two legs, with human eyes looking out of their faces and antlers dripping blood, and they were headed across the tracks into Boone.

Joey Washington: level 4; weighted baton inflicts 4 points of damage

Not deer, page 369

Jemma Howard: level 3, persuasion and writing as level 4

Arley stays at Boone Hotel but otherwise lives like a local: goes to church and the movies, takes his meals with friends he's made at the post office or the moonshine distillery, offers a helping hand to those who need it. He even goes to **Boone Hospital** for help when his bad knee's bothering him, though he usually sees Mrs. Stafford about it. The one time he was treated by Dr. Thatcher, the doctor was unable to find Arley's heartbeat with a stethoscope.

You see, Arley Blackwell has a secret: he was born without a heart. He's perfectly alive, but he doesn't know what moves his blood within his body, and it's not like he can ask about that at the hospital without drawing unwanted attention. It's bad enough that Mrs. Stafford suspects something's up with him.

And what's more, Arley Blackwell has a fear: as Barrow & Locke spread like pestilence, he's seen what the Barrow family can do, and he's terrified of being made into a **Hollow Man**. He'll do whatever he can to prevent that fate from befalling him.

In his travels, Arley's formed a theory: he knows Hollow Men don't have souls, but maybe that has something to do with the heart? It's all connected, isn't it? He believes his lack of a heart makes him vulnerable. It makes him a target.

Which brings him to his search: Arley Blackwell's been looking for a heart that fits just right in his chest. He looked in **Passelbranch** first, and then as far north as **Glamorgan**, but he didn't find anything special. Boone's a town full of welcoming, down-home people—he's sure he'll find the perfect heart here.

AVERY COUNTY

You'll find Avery County 12 miles (19 km) south of **Boone** and a bit to the west, right up against the Tennessee state line. The county doesn't have a major urban center—its residents get their needs met in Boone, mostly—and is primarily known for its pit iron mine, **B&L No. 14**. The land is inhospitable, and there's not much to look forward to other than the train passing through: Avery County is **Tweetsie** territory, and proud of it.

What with leased convict labor replacing Barrow & Locke workers in the mine, more and more Avery County residents are moving away in search of work across the state line. The real challenge of chasing opportunity, though, is getting out of Avery County alive. This craggy land has a strong hold and doesn't let its own go without a fight.

Passelbranch, page 237
Glamorgan, page 246
Boone Hospital, page 217

Boone, page 212

Mining Iron, page 220

Tweetsie, page 193

Hollow Men, page 362

A Debt to the Water, page 222

WHAT THE GM NEEDS TO KNOW

Avery County's water supply comes from **Newland Spring**—and the spring is why people have difficulty leaving. The minerals from the water get into their bones, and the land wants those minerals back when they're dead and buried.

NEWLAND

The main problem with Avery County is that the rocky ground and steep slopes aren't good for much *other* than mining. The tiny town of Newland is the county seat, and most of its 200 residents work for the mines or the railroad. Aside from the ramshackle train platform, the only other notable places in Newland are the county's courthouse, jail, and post office. Most of Avery County's water comes from a **freshwater spring** on a hill just north of town: clear, sharp-tasting water with a high mineral content. A lifetime of drinking from Newland's spring means those minerals build up in your bones—and the spring expects those minerals to return.

The train passes through Newland on a clockwork regular schedule, and Tweetsie's one of the only things you can rely on around here. Sure, everyone who lives here knows that Tweetsie's a business, but they love the way the railway stands for something greater than profit: positive service, with conductors who truly love the communities they serve and are always able to offer a little kindness in hard times. It makes residents feel like their home means more than a point on a railroad map.

Newland's mayor, **Jane Howland**, is the last of a long line of iron miners. She lives above the courthouse and prides herself on looking out for miners' best interests, but she's shy about pushing back against Barrow & Locke's labor practices. She folded like wet paper last year when Ross Bailey, who oversees the iron mine, proposed leasing convict laborers from **Kennet Penitentiary**. Bringing in cheap labor means putting Avery County men out of jobs, which means those men and their families will move away

to find work elsewhere, which puts the county on the path to becoming nothing but another prison camp. It seems like someone moves away every week, and no one new ever arrives to replace them, and those who leave never come back to visit. They never write, either, even though they promise they will. Any mail sent along to their new addresses is returned to Newland, like they never reached their destinations at all.

MINING IRON

Unlike coal, which is found in tunnels dug deep into the guts of mountains, iron ore is found closer to the surface. Iron mines like B&L No. 14 are open pits, where working men cut slabs of stone from the ground and the railroad carries it away for processing in Tennessee. The pit gets deeper and deeper year after year, with sides sloping in sharply toward the bottom. When it rains, the ground at the bottom of the pit goes soft and slick, and haints reach up through the mud: every man who died a bad death working for iron.

Barrow Mining Company came by this particular mine shortly after the Civil War, but the mine's been active for as long as oral history stretches back, and the pit goes deep with all those years of digging. Nowadays, operations are overseen by **Ross Bailey**, a tall man thin as a railroad spike, with the affectation of holding an unlit pipe between his teeth.

WHO'S WHO IN AVERY COUNTY

TY DONOVAN

Ty is a convict leased to Barrow & Locke from Kennet. He's unwashed and underfed, with deep hollows under his eyes, and Ross Bailey works him in the iron mine from sunup to dusk six days a week. One day a week—what should be his rest day—he loads freight cars in Newland. In what scant time he can steal for himself, Ty's made it his mission to befriend every Kennet man working B&L No. 14. Most of them look up to Ty as a leader, due to his kindness and quick sense of humor. The way Ty sees it, he has no choice but to be optimistic: he's getting out of here and bringing all the Kennet men with him. The Green will guide him home to his family's land outside of Baker's Gap.

Ross Bailey: level 4; carries the keys to any manacled convict laborers

Tweetsie runs from Boone through Avery County and into Tennessee. Fare is \$20 to traverse the entire line.

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines.

Ty Donovan: level 4, social interactions as level 6, defense against magic as level 6; can always identify which direction leads toward Baker's Gap

Jane Howland: level 3

Kennet, page 222



CONVICT LABOR IN THE MINE

When it comes down to it, Ross Bailey has no compunctions about leasing convicts for work in his iron mine. It's cheaper than paying living wages to B&L men, and he doesn't have to deal with talk about *unions* or anything like that. And the way he sees it, these prisoners come from **Kennet**; their sentences would entail hard labor either way, and that labor is how they pay society back for their wrongdoings.

Mr. Bailey doesn't think of himself as a cruel man, but his casual mistreatment of his leased convicts is obvious to anyone familiar with how the mine is run. He gives them the bare minimum of food and shelter to hold up his end of his deal with Kennet, and works them unreasonable

hours without days off. He doesn't see them as human, but as the sum of their worldly transgressions—and as tools he can use to extract profit from the ground.

Ty Donovan is the de facto leader of the Kennet laborers, because he's got a plan to get them out of here. His grandma had a gift, a connection to **the Green** that she passed on to her children and grandchildren, and Ty was warded on the day of his birth and every birthday after. No matter how far he wanders, no matter what trouble life throws at him, the Green will guide him home to his family's land outside of **Baker's Gap**. He's crossing over into Tennessee, and he's taking every other convict working B&L No. 14 with him.

Kennet, page 222

The Green, page 188

Baker's Gap, page 226

A DEBT TO THE WATER

Newland Spring: Characters who drink from the spring once receive an asset on their next task. Characters who drink from the spring repeatedly must succeed on a level 3 Might task to leave Avery County, with the level increasing by 1 for each week spent in the county; on a failed roll, the character loses consciousness and awakens at the spring.

Passelbranch, page 237

Newland Spring, out on a hill north of town, isn't just any freshwater spring. It's good water, clean water, full of minerals from the ground—and when those minerals get into you, Newland Spring wants 'em back.

Take, for example, what happened to Ephriam O'Brien. He was a miner at B&L No. 14, planning to look for work at a foundry in **Passelbranch** when shifts in the mine got scarce. He bought his train ticket and made plans to head out. The night before he was to leave, his brother **Cal** went by Ephriam's place to say his goodbyes and found his brother in a state: agitated, with

something vacant behind his eyes, talking nonsense about owing a debt to the water. He couldn't go away, you see. He couldn't die and be buried somewhere else, let all those good Avery County minerals decompose into the groundwater all the way over in Tennessee. He belonged to Avery County, and he belonged to Newland Spring.

Cal watched as Ephriam scaled the hill to the spring and stepped clean out of his skin. Everything else, all the meat and blood and bone that had been inside of him, dissolved down into the water without a trace.

Cal O'Brien: level 2; carries a hip flask engraved with Ephriam's initials

Ty hasn't seen much in this life that scares him, but he's terrified of the iron mine at night. Even working the pit at sunset is enough to frighten him, when the sky's dark blue and the stars have just started to make themselves known. The haints down there are hungry, he says, and they want to pull the workers down too.

WILSON RANDOLPH

Wilson is a Tweetsie conductor with a smile for everyone he meets, recognizable by his work uniform and the scar through his left eyebrow. He knows most of Newland's residents, having done a favor for almost all of them at some point—whether that's procuring something along his route, passing on a letter, or carrying their groceries. When passenger cars aren't running, he takes it upon himself to make sure anyone packed into the freight cars is as comfortable as they possibly can be.

When folks plan to move out of Avery County, Wilson helps them secure passage on the train—but something strange happens after that. Either they never show up to catch the train at the appointed time, or they *do* board the train, but they're nowhere to be found when Wilson pulls into the next station. Wilson wrote off the first few such incidents, but now he wants to get to the bottom of it—why won't Avery County let its own go?

Warden Vincent Bateman, page 224

CAL O'BRIEN

Cal runs Newland's post office. He doesn't talk much, but he listens, and he has the kind of boyish face that makes people tell him things. As such, he knows almost everything going on in Avery County, and he'll pass on that knowledge in exchange for a nip of liquor. He's taken to drinking more since he saw his brother Ephriam die—otherwise, he can't stop seeing the way Ephriam's body fell apart in the freshwater spring north of Newland.

KENNET

Kennet Penitentiary is a 7,500-acre tobacco farm in eastern North Carolina, bordering the Virginia state line. Most men convicted of a crime in North Carolina, assuming they're able to put up with the physical strain, serve at least part of their sentence at Kennet. The convicts are meant to redeem themselves through hard labor, but **Warden Bateman** will tell you outright that he's here for profit, not rehabilitation . . . and tobacco grown in North Carolina's red clay soil sure is profitable. The way the warden sees it, none of us are anything more than the sum of our actions. Breaking your back working in the fields, or burning half to death curing tobacco leaves—it's necessary work, and it's a start, but it doesn't take away the stains of the past. The men in his charge are convicts, and *convict* is a distinct category from *person*. A crime is a line drawn in the sand, separating who you are from who you were,

AVERY COUNTY HUSHED MURMURS

BROTHERS IN THE PIT

During the Civil War, the iron mined in Avery County went toward the Confederate war effort. The pit was shallower in those years but still a deadly fall, and two brothers who found themselves on opposite sides of the war each tried to push the other in. They wrestled right over the edge, fell in together, and both broke their necks at the bottom.

Bad deaths breed hungry ghosts, revenants who want nothing more than to make the living hurt. The brothers are mostly harmless, but every few years they get a bit too handsy, and someone—usually a miner—goes tumbling headfirst into the pit.

OUT DOWSING

The freshwater spring that feeds Newland has dried up, diverted underground. Jane Howland dug her great-grandmother's dowsing rod out of the chest of family heirlooms, determined to find where the water's gone, but she has no idea how to use the damn thing.

RAILWAY WITH A HEART

Tweetsie conductors take care of the communities they serve—but Wilson Randolph has found himself spread too thin lately. He owes three different Newland families errands in one day and could use a hand fulfilling his obligations and keeping the train running on schedule. The task he's most eager to hand off is banishing the family of destructive ghosts that have moved into the Ballard family's apartment.

Jane Howland, page 220

Dowsing rod: level 4; a person skilled in magical lore can use it to point to the nearest flow of water or magic within a long distance; comes due 1 in 1d20

and the best thing these men can do now is make themselves useful.

Warden Bateman's logic might seem sound to like-minded individuals, until you get a close look at the 13th Amendment: involuntary servitude is prohibited except as punishment for a crime. The warden's argument falls apart even further when you look at Kennet's population: largely Black and Native American men, and most of 'em weren't given fair trials to begin with. Men who are trying hard every day to hold on to who they are, and who they *were*, before they came under the warden's supervision. If actions are what makes a man, memory's what drives the action. Our memories teach us who we are, and Kennet men see strange things happen to their memories the longer they work these tobacco fields. Nothing as simple as amnesia—rather, entirely new memories taking root as if they'd always been there, bending each inmate's sense of self by shifting how they think about their past.

But the way it is now, the warden oversees these fields, and anyone who hears the jingling keys on his belt would do well to keep their head down and avoid making trouble.

LIFE AT KENNET

Prisoners are awoken before dawn and expected to report promptly to their work assignments: planting, harvesting, or curing tobacco, depending on the season. Each task is grueling in its own way, whether it's working in chain gangs to sow and fertilize seeds, harvesting tobacco leaf by leaf, or curing those leaves in barns heated to sweltering temperatures by smoky wood fires. The resulting bright yellow leaves, used both for smoking and chewing, are desirable and expensive—but the men who grow the crop never see a cent, or even a *thank you* for their efforts. All they've got is the lingering smell of tobacco in their hair and clothing, even coming out of their pores when they sweat.

After dark in the cell blocks, during their water breaks, and over dinner in the mess hall, Kennet's inmates tell each other stories. Without repeating what happened each day, it's easy to let the days run together—so the men hold on tight to little bits of nuance, details like “Mrs. Beard put peppers in the stew today,” or “Kreuger was whistling off-key as he made his rounds just before dawn.” They tell stories from before, too: who they were, the lives that were torn from them. At least that way, someone might notice when a

Ruby-Mae Beard, page 224

Evan Krueger, page 224

Warden Vincent Bateman:
*level 4; carries keys to every
lock in the prison; pistol inflicts
5 points of damage*

Hal Denton: *level 4*

Newland, page 220

Jody McEntyre: *level 2*

Ruby-Mae Beard: *level 2*

Evan Krueger: *level 3;
carries a master key from
dusk to dawn, as well as a set
of manacles; baton inflicts 4
points of damage*

memory is replaced with something else—a single man recalling a wife and children, for instance, or a North Carolina native recalling a childhood spent in Kentucky. Kennet men look out for each other, steward each other's pasts, because no one else will. If they go mad reaching for half-remembered lives, the warden wouldn't care—not as long as they kept right on working.

At night, Kennet is flooded with the ghosts of every man who's died here, reliving their deaths over and over—and most of those deaths weren't the peaceful kind. Only the inmates can see them, but Krueger, the newest guard, turns pale whenever his rounds take him through a death scene. He can't see the ghosts; his reaction is just the instinct that something is wrong.

CONVICT LEASING

In addition to their work at Kennet, prisoners are leased to private plantations, mines, and railways. This money ends up in the government's coffers after the warden takes his share. There are Kennet men all over North Carolina, often laboring in chain gangs, their work chants audible for miles.

Most Kennet men spend some time working on the McEntyre plantation, a corn farm 4 miles (6.5 km) away run by **Jody McEntyre**. Jody is pleased with each year's harvest, even when the corn turns up strange—like last year, when one stalk in every ten grew human viscera in place of fruit.

WHO'S WHO AT KENNET

WARDEN BATEMAN

Vincent Bateman, the man in charge of Kennet Penitentiary, is a family man—everything he does is to make a living, to better support his wife and five daughters. He grew up training hunting dogs and horses, and he's damn good at squeezing labor out of those he doesn't quite see as *people*.

HAL DENTON

Hal is a convict, six years into his sentence at Kennet. He tries to keep a chipper attitude about his ordeal, often joking that going to prison is a great way to see the whole state: he's been leased out all over North Carolina, and probably wouldn't have left his hometown of **Newland** otherwise. He keeps quiet about the triple homicide that landed him in Kennet. If asked about it, Hal insists that he's not a violent man, and certainly not an unreasonable man. He technically committed murder, but he was defending himself and his child.

He swears he's got a family waiting for him when he's released: his wife died young, but his son is being raised by his sister. According to the other inmates, that's not the story Hal started out telling—he used to say that he had a daughter, left in the care of his mother-in-law.

RUBY-MAE BEARD

Ruby-Mae oversees Kennet's kitchen and is responsible for feeding some 700 inmates as cheaply as possible. Though most of her work involves ordering supplies and planning meals, she works in the mess hall serving the men their supper on Sundays. A lot of ingredients are delivered to Kennet daily, and Ruby-Mae keeps this process running smoothly—which means that her control over what goods arrive is second only to the warden's.

EVAN KRUEGER

Evan Krueger is a fresh-faced guard who patrols the dormitories overnight. He works with a few more-experienced men, but he's absent-minded and liable to wander off on his own. He carries a master cell key, which he returns to the warden each morning when his shift ends.



KENNET HUSHED MURMURS

TEETH IN THE CROP

Tobacco fields are dangerous and strange by nature: rows and rows of identical stalks, each one growing taller than a man; the whisper of those leaves moving against each other in the wind, almost like human voices. Those fields are eerie at the best of times—and this surely isn't the best of times. The harvest has just come in, and every one of those identical plants contained the same surprise: a knife-sharp bobcat's tooth growing at the base of each leaf.

RIOT

Dusty Waller was Kennet's toughest inmate, the stuff of legend and tall tales passed down in the cell blocks twenty years after his death. He led a rebellion, a group of prisoners taking a guard hostage, and went down fighting.

Dusty Waller is now a ghost, forced to relive his death every night, and he's tired of dying. More than that, if he's going to die over and over, he wants it to be *for* something. He's ready to start another rebellion—one that might succeed, this time—and based on rumors in the mess hall, it's working. A riot is brewing at Kennet, and Warden Bateman has no idea.

WOLVES CIRCLING

There aren't many red wolves around these parts anymore, although once in a great while, the inmates say they can hear wolf howls from inside the prison in the quietest, deadest part of night. But last week, a couple of the inmates working early morning kitchen duty saw a red wolf standing inside the mess hall—and they swore she was talking to someone in the shadows.

Dusty Waller has ghostly hitcher stats, page 357

Chapter 14: TENNESSEE

If you're a player, stop right here and check with the GM before reading any further, just in case they want to keep some of this secret for now.

Baker's Gap is the name of the town proper, while locals just call the surrounding land "the gap."

The Walker House, page 231

Clinton, page 239

Cumberland Plateau, page 242

The Green, page 188

The Inner Dark, page 188

Around Town, page 228

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines.

Poor weather can render Gap Road impassable and leave characters stranded.

The eastern edge of Tennessee follows the highest peaks of the Blue Ridge, the state line hand in hand with the ridgeline. The Blue Ridge Mountains are taller than the sky and older than old, covered in fog that runs thicker than coal smoke, and it takes a stubborn cuss to make that land into a home. That's who you'll find in Tennessee, getting by in woods older than memory, on craggy ground with a great darkness below.

Moving west from the Blue Ridge, with its brutal peaks and flourishing gaps, takes you into the Great Valley: lowlands cut through by the Clinch River, flowing down to meet the Tennessee River and keep on traveling south. Farther west still is the Cumberland Plateau, with its caves and cliffs, valleys and waterfalls, and black bears that serve the Green. The Inner Dark lingers under the beautiful land, the living is hard, and ours is the tale of the families that survive in the face of it.



In the town of Baker's Gap, Tennessee, blood lines run way back to the settling of these hills. Old families come from all over the place to find their new tomorrow in the hills of east Tennessee.

—Season 2, Episode 14: On Death Island



Along an ancient continental margin in the foothills, darkness had found ventilation from the time the old things first began dreaming. Darkness had pushed up through the bedrock and into the black soil of what would one day be Baker's Gap, Tennessee.

—A Once-Told Tale: The Wolf Sisters Part Three

BAKER'S GAP

Whether you call it a gap, a valley, or a cove—the difference is splitting hairs—Tennessee's full of 'em: low-lying green places hidden between mountain ridges. A pocket of good growing land in the middle of the Blue Ridge, perfect for growing corn or cotton or just a life for yourself and your family.

Baker's Gap in Johnson County is one of the bigger gaps around, not speaking in terms of population but in terms of sprawl. The valley spreads 12 miles (19 km), from the town of Baker's Gap proper at the west end to the Walker House in the east, and is home to about 750 people. The town is an old one, with families that trace their lineage back to when these hills were settled by overseas immigrants—folk who stay here, generation after generation, on account of the modest prosperity brought by the railroad.

Out in the gap, where the land's still wild, is where you'll find folk who were drawn to Baker's Gap for its true wealth: the richness of the Green, the magic that runs through the unspoiled trees and grasses. But all that good green growth covers darkness underneath—things long buried and best left unbothered—and the rattle of the railroad threatens to bring that darkness to the surface.

Most newcomers arrive in Baker's Gap by way of the Barrow & Locke train. Gap Road runs the length of the valley, then the black macadam road turns toward Tipton in one direction and Paradise in the other—there's even an offshoot that cuts across the Blue Ridge toward Boone—but those mountain roads are tough, and only the best engines can muscle their way over the inclines.

BAKER'S GAP OVERVIEW



THE TOWN OF BAKER'S GAP



*Good Mother Ministries,
page 232*

Claude Pickens: level 4;
storytelling, persuasion, and
public speaking as level 6

Judge Norville Craft: level
3; hearing, perception, and
intelligence as level 2

Josephine Pickens: level 4;
persuasion and organization
as level 5

*The Ladies' Auxiliary's current
fundraising initiative is for
the orphanage over in Tipton
(page 235).*

Lee Huffman: level 4,
detecting the influence of the
Inner Dark as level 5

*Mrs. Huffman agrees with
Pastor Pickens that the Green
is the province of God and the
Inner Dark is just another word
for the devil. She's always been
able to feel where the devil
lingers, where things just aren't
right or natural.*

The Inner Dark, page 188

Georgie Triplett: level 3;
cooking and baking as level 5

*A character who eats fish from
the reservoir must succeed on
a level 4 Might roll or their
Might tasks are hindered for
the next six hours.*

Sheriff Andy Hodge: level 4,
investigation and perception
as level 5, understanding magic
as level 3; carries a pistol that
does 5 points of damage

*General Store & Auto Repair &
Post Office, page 230*

AROUND TOWN

RISING CREEK BAPTIST

Baker's Gap—the town, at least—is Free Will Baptist territory. Every Sunday evening, the majority of the fine people come to Rising Creek to worship. The modest brick building fills to capacity, stained glass windows gleaming with lantern light. Services full of singing and hollering are led by **Pastor Claude Pickens**, a natural-born orator who's the best the gap's seen behind a pulpit. Pastor Pickens preaches in his trousers and shirtsleeves, his balding head gleaming with sweat even in the winter, and takes a firm stance on dividing that which is godly from that which isn't. He can feel the Green thrumming beneath Baker's Gap—everyone can—but he chalks it up to the Heavenly Father, and says that it's not man's place to interfere in God's work.

While Pastor Pickens leads worship services, the church's real work is done by his wife, **Josephine**. Mrs. Pickens runs the Ladies' Auxiliary, which is the backbone of Rising Creek Baptist: a group of women who organize fundraising initiatives, visit the sick and elderly, bring food to the shut-in and needy, and knock on doors to spread the Good Word to the lost. The Ladies' Auxiliary is a small army and runs with the precision you'd expect from any battalion—which can include leaving its newest members overworked and underappreciated until they've risen up in the ranks.

Georgie Triplett arrived in Baker's Gap not too long ago and picked up the slack as one of the only single women in the Ladies' Auxiliary. While the other women went home to tend to their husbands and their babies, Georgie was expected to keep on working. She didn't mind it, at first—it was just the pecking order of Mrs. Pickens and her hen house, the way things tend to go in small towns like this one—but Georgie found something better than the thankless work of the Ladies' Auxiliary out in the gap. Church folk tend to church folk around here, but what about the people who aren't holy enough for Baker's Gap proper? Folks on the outer edges of society, drifting on the rails and living rough in tents—who's looking out for them? Georgie comes to worship at Rising Creek on Sundays, but she spends

her Saturdays taking food to camps out in the gap, and **Good Mother Ministries** holds a special place in her heart. If you're new to Rising Creek Baptist and haven't found your way, she'll invite you out to Good Mother Ministries for a pancake breakfast and worship service.

BAKER'S GAP COURTHOUSE

The courthouse is a low-slung two-story building on the corner of Varner and Main, and serves as the legislative and judicial hub for this quiet corner of Johnson County. The county's big cases are tried over in Tipton—as the doddering **Judge Craft** will tell you, the biggest fuss around here is fishing in the reservoir without a license.

Baker's Gap has never stood too much on ceremony: this is the kind of town where, if the sheriff retires, he'll pass his badge to his oldest or smartest deputy. The kind of town where, if the mayor moves away, they'll just flip a coin between the two people who want the job most. Which means that everyone's just waiting on Judge Craft to pass on with the natural course of time so he can be replaced, because the old man hasn't had his wits about him for decades.

Mrs. Lee Huffman, who lives alongside the reservoir and is a proud member of the Ladies' Auxiliary, has a whole list of concerns that Judge Craft's been ignoring, and fishing's just one of them. About one in five fish pulled from the reservoir come out unnatural, covered in blinking eyes, and you're better off throwing 'em back into the water because they don't sit right in the belly. She's also up in arms about the squatters' encampments out in the gap and the proliferation of alcohol in town—both of which are forces of corruption, threatening to undo all of her good and godly work. Mrs. Huffman would never harm the old judge, but she might look the other way if an unfortunate accident befell him. She might even be looking for folk who could make such an accident happen.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

It used to be customary for the sheriff to work out of the courthouse, but **Sheriff Andy Hodge** moved his office into a storefront that was vacated when the **general store** merged with the post office and auto repair. It's a

small, drafty building with a single cell at the back, and it does the job well enough. It's more than enough space for the sheriff; his wife, **Sherry**, who handles paperwork and answering the phone; and his deputy, **James Mutter**.

Baker's Gap is a quiet town and there's not too much demand on Sheriff Hodge's time—especially with his complimentary membership to Bill Ward's chess club. There's that business with **man-eating wolves**, but he's put out a bounty for the wolves in question, and his joints are too old to venture out hunting. Which is to say, Andy Hodge has some long, slow afternoons, and he's been passing them reading through his grandmama's old journals that he keeps stashed in his office. His father's mother was a seer, and Andy's trying to teach himself how to scry. He hasn't had much luck so far, but maybe this will show him where the wolves make their den.

THE LUCKY YELL

Before that business with the temperance movement made liquor illegal, The Lucky Yell was a thriving bar. Now it's a struggling little diner and, even though the liquor taps have long been moved into Bill's place up the street, all the churchgoing folk from Rising Creek Baptist act like the taint of liquor will get on 'em if they so much as step in the doorway. The Lucky Yell isn't exactly profitable, seeing as it's empty most of the time, but it's a decent place for a meal if you're new in town and don't mind the way the church ladies will look at you if they see you eating inside. **Arnie Ward** mostly keeps running The Lucky Yell out of sentiment, and to keep up appearances—his real money is made helping out with Bill's chess club.

WARD HARDWARE & LUMBER

Ward Hardware & Lumber is a perfectly standard and well-stocked shop, with lumber stored on the covered porch out back. **Bill Ward**, the shopkeep, is more than happy to sell you any sorts of tools and supplies you might need. The real draw of the hardware store is its basement, which is restricted to paying members of Bill's chess club. For a dollar a month, you can access the basement whenever you please—along with Arnie's liquor taps stored down there.

Tennessee was the first state to ban alcohol, so of course it's home to the fiercest moonshiners, especially hiding out in the wilds of the Blue Ridge. The Ward brothers don't make alcohol, but they buy and sell it—they meet their supplier, known only as the moonshiner, every other Friday at midnight where the train tracks cut close to the reservoir. They don't even have to work too hard to avoid the gaze of the law, seeing as Bill's wife is Sheriff Hodge's baby sister. Andy keeps quiet in exchange for a complimentary chess club membership and the knowledge that **Bonnie** is living well on her husband's bootlegging money.

Bill Ward takes the lead when he and Arnie go pick up barrels of liquor, so he was the one to speak up when he saw that they'd been shorted in their latest shipment: a whole 40 liters of liquor missing. He was the one who ended up with the moonshiner's long, spindly hand around his throat, choking him until the edges of the world went dark. He was the one who saw their supplier's face—a face unlike anything he'd seen before, that rattled him down to his core. A face entirely without skin, plated over with sheets of tree bark, with bloody muscle showing through the gaps. Now Bill's terrified to go back out to the railroad tracks to pick up more alcohol, but Friday's approaching, and he's got paying customers to keep happy.

THE MOONSHINER

He was a normal man, once, until an explosion of his liquor still burned most of the skin off his body. It was the Green that saved him, replacing all that crackling skin with tree bark. Now the moonshiner travels the Blue Ridge, selling his wares to small-town bootleggers, always keeping his face hidden. He's quiet and quick to rage, and often feels like the fire pulled all the joy out of him. Still, he finds comfort in knowing that his moonshine allows his customers to feel the happiness he's lost. He meets the Ward brothers at the south edge of the reservoir every other Friday to make a trade.

Sherry Hodge: level 4, reading and arithmetic as level 5

James Mutter: level 4; carries a pistol that does 5 points of damage

Man-eating wolves: see the Clutch, page 232

Bonnie Ward: level 4, firearms as level 6; most often found behind the bar in the basement of Ward Hardware & Lumber, where she's quick to pull a rifle on customers who get belligerent

The moonshiner: level 5, intimidation as level 6; Armor 1

Arnie Ward: level 4, perception and deception as level 5; carries a pocket-sized ledger of alcohol sales and "chess club" memberships

Due to the temperance movement, the sale of liquor's been restricted in Tennessee since 1909.

Bill Ward: level 4; perception, persuasion, and deception as level 5; carries a small pistol tucked into his boot

Ingrid Witt: level 3, perception and intelligence as level 4; carries a bone-handled hunting knife given to her by Marcie Walker

Zoah Kirk: level 4; strength, speed, and repairing mechanical objects as level 5; perception as level 3

Sheriff's Office, page 228

Regina Morgan: level 3, logistics and bookkeeping as level 4

Copperheads, page 347

GENERAL STORE & AUTO REPAIR & POST OFFICE

This two-story brick building on the corner of Varner and Main, across from the courthouse, started as a post office. It was built bigger than Baker's Gap needed it to be, out of a sense of ambition—room to serve more residents as the town got bigger. But the town never really grew, leaving **Postmaster Ingrid Witt** with far more space than she could ever hope to use, which is why local repairwoman **Zoah Kirk** approached her about setting up an auto shop in the back. The two women went into business together, and now there's even a fuel pump in the cracked asphalt parking lot.

The most recent addition to the conglomerate is the general store, which used to be where the **sheriff's office** is now. Like the post office, the general store was ambitiously built, and didn't hardly need the amount of space it took up. It was too much work to heat in the winter, the owner **Ms. Regina Morgan** said, and too hard to keep mice out of the dry goods.

Now the three businesses share a footprint, and their proprietresses are thick as thieves. The General Store & Auto Repair & Post Office is a jovial place, full of harmless pranks and jokes. Last week, Ms. Regina swapped the pieces of an engine Zoah's been rebuilding with a 10-pound sack of flour, and had Zoah searching all over for the pistons all day. Now Zoah's looking for lighthearted revenge and isn't above roping customers into the game.

DEATH ISLAND

The story of Death Island begins with the reservoir. See, this low-lying gap was carved in the mountains by water making its way east—and the land is what was left

behind when the flow of water dried up. Nowadays, the valley comes to life with the spring melt and the summer rain, and the runoff is diverted into a man-made lake for safekeeping throughout the year. The reservoir's even got fish, though no one knows exactly how they got there.

Death Island isn't really an island; it's a grove of pines on the bank of the reservoir, surrounded by water on three sides when the summer rains raise the water line, and it belongs to the little boys of Baker's Gap. It's a kingdom of make-believe and play-pretend, where a boy can be a knight, a sheriff, or an outlaw, waging wars with sticks and pinecones instead of guns and swords. During the daytime, that is.

It's the kind of ancient history that folk don't like to talk about, a sore spot that's even been scrubbed from the official records, but the whole town of Baker's Gap used to sit where the reservoir is now. The lowest point in a dry valley seemed like a perfectly good place to settle down—until a season of damn near biblical rain flooded the whole thing, and the federal government showed up acting like they'd planned the whole catastrophe. "We'll make it a lake," they said, with no mention of the lives lost or the homes destroyed. "You can just rebuild your little town over *there*," they said, "and let us take care of the water supply. We'll even get hydroelectric power going, while we're at it—so really, shouldn't you be thanking us?"

When the sun's up, the worst thing you've got to worry about on Death Island is **copperheads**, and they'll only bite if you step on 'em. At night, you'd be lucky if a snakebite is what took you—because at night, the reservoir's ghosts come out to play, and if you die, you'll play with them forever.



You give a group of boys from anywhere a backyard, a stretch of woods, hell, a vacant lot even, and you can watch it rise to a place of hallowed glory. A patch of trees between houses can become an ancient battlefield where two sides of some long remembered or forgotten conflict plays out again and again after school hours. An empty, fallow field becomes an arena or tournament ground where rassling, foot racing and some sort of ball-related sport are contested and pushed to the highest form of the game. Friendships and rivalries will rise, fall, and be remembered in legend forever and ever.

—Season 2, Episode 14: On Death Island



DEATH ISLAND'S GHOSTS

Death Island's ghosts are those poor souls that died when the original town of Baker's Gap flooded. This gaggle of haints watches from the shore as little boys play cops and robbers all day, wishing they could join in—adults and children alike. At night, they surface on Death Island and run around like they're little and alive. In their games and adventures, they can forget the pain of drowning as the town slipped underwater, and the frustration of standing knee-deep in that water all day, invisible and bored to death as children play.

Death Island's ghosts are dressed in clothing from a century ago that's soaked through with reservoir water, tattered and muddled from night after night of running rowdy. They're always looking for someone new to play with them. If you're on Death Island after dark, the ghosts will incite a game of tag; any of the living that get caught by the tagger will be forced to join the ghosts forever.

OUT IN THE GAP

THE WALKER HOUSE

The Walker House is a sprawling home made of stone and logs, perched back against a hill so that it looks like it grows up out of the bones of the mountain. Once a brothel by the name of Pleasant Evenings, nowadays the Walker House is a safe haven for women, run by the powerfully gifted **Marcie Walker**—a sturdy woman with vibrant red hair who carries a bone-inlaid **walking stick** as a magic focus. Marcie's mother was one of seven sisters, and Marcie herself is the eldest of seven sisters, and that carries power around here. Marcie can create wards that hold almost indefinitely, like those that ring the Walker House, and she can bind things by speaking their names.

Marcie bends her connection with the Green toward keeping those with harmful intentions off of her land—and the wards will certainly repel them—and keeping tabs on other gifted women around these parts.

Death Island's ghosts: level 3, *Speed* tasks as level 4; incorporeal and invisible during daylight hours; evading a ghost in a game of tag is a level 4 *Speed* task, and characters who fail at this task must succeed on a level 3 *Intellect* task or become one of the ghosts

Marcie Walker: level 5, using and understanding magic as level 7, protecting those in her care as level 7; casts level 6 fixed wards around a medium area that repel anyone who would harm someone Marcie is protecting and fails a level 6 *Intellect* roll, throwing them back a short distance; those who cross the wards take 6 points of damage

Marcie's staff: level 4, defensive magic as level 6; an oak staff with bone, which appears to be neither human nor animal, set into carvings on the handle; eases all defensive uses of magic by two steps; comes due 1 in 1d100

Bertha Norris: level 5; health 24; inflicts 4 points of damage in human form and 7 points of damage in wolf form

Ellie Walker, page 247

Glamorgan, page 246

Melvin Blevins, page 21

Sheriff Hodge, page 228

Marcie Walker, page 231

Wolf sisters, page 386

The Good Mother is an alternate name for the Dead Queen.

The way Marcie sees it, unpleasant attention for some means unpleasant attention for all, so it's best if women with her kind of power stay close and escape notice, as long as you remember that being sneaky isn't the same thing as being docile. Marcie's especially concerned about what's going on in the Clutch, and is looking for a way to help those poor women recover from whatever corruption's gotten into them.

Other folks you might spot at the Walker House include Marcie's sister **Ellie**, who's just as talented and stubborn—she lives out in **Glamorgan**, where she carves items out of bone that offer protection to the women carrying them, but she often visits her older sister in Baker's Gap. Marcie's got a few of Ellie's creations on hand to offer up to those in need: a bone-handled knife, a hand mirror with a bone inlay, a carved comb. You're also likely to run into **Melvin Blevins**, and you can't miss him: he's over 6 feet tall, 300 pounds, and committed to protecting the Walker House however he can. He hasn't got a touch of the gift, but he's always willing to lend a hand, especially if Marcie's the one asking.

THE CLUTCH

You'll find all kinds of squatters and encampments out in the gap, and the Clutch is one of them: a handful of rickety wooden buildings around a shared firepit and yard, crisscrossed with clotheslines, on land that its inhabitants have no legal claim to. But unlike those other camps, the Clutch is a hideout for women in trouble—most of whom aren't the right shade of white, and all of whom can turn into **wolves**.

See, there's a reason no one's built a proper home on this land, though the women of the Clutch don't know that. They've set up camp about a mile from the railroad tracks, close enough to feel the train shake the ground on a quiet night—and close enough to fall victim to what the train shakes loose from underneath. The darkness that hides beneath the ground is working its way up here, and it's corrupted their food and herbs. Everything these women eat and use in their workings is invisibly tainted, and now the women are tainted, too.

By day, the Clutch is full of women just trying to get by. They work together to tend gardens, build shacks, wash clothes, and cook

meals. By night, they turn into a pack on the hunt, taking down men who have wronged women up and down Baker's Gap. All that's left behind are throats and hands, mauled and half-eaten bodies. There are never any witnesses—just death and wolf tracks.

The wolf sisters of the Clutch are led by **Bertha Norris**, the witch who produces the salve of rendered fat that enables them to transform. Once they slather it over their skin, they can turn from woman to wolf and back as many times as they wish over the course of a single night. This transformation started out as a blessing, as a way for Bertha and her gang to protect themselves—and avenge other women who might not be so lucky. But the herbs used in the salve are tainted by the Inner Dark, and the wolf sisters find themselves driven to hunting for sport, spending more time walking on four legs than on two. Bertha becomes more convinced each day that the wolf is her true form, and she's looking for a way to hunt with teeth and claws forever.

Naturally, the uptick in wolf maulings has drawn some attention: **Sheriff Hodge** has put up a generous bounty for wolf heads, and gangs of men set out hunting with their guns each day at sundown. In the daylight, no one would suspect the women of the Clutch; at night, their camp looks entirely abandoned, like so many other failed settlements in the gap. The sheriff and his militia haven't looked twice at the Clutch's women, but **Marcie Walker** knows they're behind this, and she's looking for a way to bring them under control before they're found out.

GOOD MOTHER MINISTRIES

Like the Clutch, Good Mother Ministries is an encampment scraping by in the gap: a group of people unwanted by society, not white enough or holy enough to fit into Baker's Gap proper, who have come together to live as a community in service of the **Good Mother**. Though they live in tents and makeshift shelters, the congregation has built a whole town of men, women, and children, with maintained communal spaces. Most days are devoted to the work of living—chores, and the occasional train robbery for supplies—but Saturdays are for worship, and that's when Good Mother Ministries comes alive.



Speaker Timothy, a barrel-chested person with sandy hair and freckled bronze skin, tells his gathered followers of the Age of the Reckoning. The time is nigh, he says, for the Good Mother to walk. The Good Mother is coming, and she will punish evildoers, and she will punish everyone who's cast us out and done us wrong. But the Good Mother needs our help, he says: for her to rise, we must vanquish those who would keep her contained in the ground.

Like the Dead Queen they worship, Good Mother Ministries belongs to neither the Inner Dark nor the Green, and has no true enemy in either faction. Every seven years, when representatives of the Inner Dark and the Green work together to bind the Dead Queen, Good Mother Ministries aims to stop them.

THE GRAVE OF THE DEAD QUEEN

Half a day's drive out of Baker's Gap, in a place you won't find on any map, lies the grave of the **Dead Queen**. It's here that speakers for both the Inner Dark and the Green gather every seventh year to bind her in the ground, but some years—hungry years—she crawls out of the ground early, with her baby in her arms, looking for vengeance.

Every head in attendance bowed as the Speaker knelt and scooped up a handful of soil and held it to the sun, as if to judge its content and color, and asked the gathered number, "Kinfolk, how does the Dark Earth find you?"

The response was instantaneous and in unison: "The Dark Earth by day finds us planting worthy seed."

"And how by night?" the Speaker asked, drawing out what was clearly a familiar question.

Again, the assembly spoke as one in response: "The Dark Earth at night finds us digging worthy graves."

—Season 2, Episode 20: *Am I Born to Die?*

TIPTON

Tipton's bigger than **Baker's Gap**, seeing as it's the seat of Johnson County, but it's got a reputation as a stopping-over kind of place. The population withers and swells as people come and go, with a core of about 1,000, as folks from remote areas of the Blue Ridge come through town looking for work at **Tipton Steel** or **King Denim**. None of them stick around too long before they end up headed north on the train, either to **Paradise** or somewhere more exotic. Even the little ones at Tipton's Home for the Young—or **The Home**, as people around here call it—are just passing through on their way to somewhere else.

Speaker Timothy: level 4; persuasion, leadership, and oration as level 6; can sense when the Good Mother rises from her grave; uses the name Timothy and masculine terms when speaking for the Good Mother, and the name Evelyn and feminine terms in everyday life

Baker's Gap, page 226
The Dead Queen, page 354
Tipton Steel, page 234
King Denim, page 234
Paradise, page 250
The Home, page 235

BAKER'S GAP HUSHED MURMURS

FINDING LAYA MUTTER

Laya Mutter—wife of sheriff's deputy James Mutter—has come up missing; she left on Saturday morning for a brunch meeting with the Ladies' Auxiliary and never came home. James has been looking all over for her, and he's afraid she may have ended up somewhere sinful, like the Walker House or one of the vagabond camps out in the woods. When asked *why* Laya might have run off, James gets cagey, trips over his words, and is unable to answer.

CLEARING GAP ROAD

A thicket of kudzu's grown across Gap Road and the train tracks overnight, blocking cars from leaving Baker's Gap proper. Sheriff Hodge is looking for folks to help clear the debris, not realizing that the heap of vines is actually the sleeping form of the kudzu man.

TO CURE WHAT AILS

Mr. Riley, the sweet old man who lives out by the reservoir, has fallen ill. His daughter Iris is taking care of him and insists that the women of the Ladies' Auxiliary stay away, in case the sickness is catching. The truth is that Iris has been conducting rituals to try to heal her father, and she doesn't realize that those rituals have entered the whole town of Baker's Gap into a deal with the Inner Dark.

Laya Mutter: level 3; carries a compact mirror given to her by Marcie Walker

Compact mirror: level 4, scrying as level 5; shows the truth the beholder most needs to see when used as a scrying focus; comes due 1 in 1d20

Ezekiel Riley: level 3
Marcie Walker, page 231
James Mutter, page 229

Iris Riley: level 4; deception, persuasion, and healing magic as level 5

The Inner Dark, page 188
Rising Creek Baptist, page 228
The Walker House, page 231
The Clutch, page 232
Sheriff Hodge, page 228
Kudzu man, page 367

Ginny Books: level 4;
intellect, perception, and
understanding magic as level 5;
using magic as level 2

The Green, page 188

Gray Ladies, page 358
*The Thing Whose Name
Sounds Like Horned Head But
Is Not*, page 376

Dell's Family, page 236

*Tipton hosts B&L's
southernmost station in
Tennessee. See Appalachian
Railroads on page 193 for more
about the various routes and
railway lines.*

Claude Stanton: level 4,
providing encouragement
or persuasion as level 5;
recognizable by his oxblood-red
denim jacket

Passelbranch, page 237

Malachi Brewer: level 4,
tasks requiring concentration
as level 3, hearing messages
from aggrieved ghosts as level 6

Here's the thing that everyone who comes to Tipton knows: something's wrong here. Whether you've got the gift or not, whether you can reach down into the earth and touch **the Green** or you leave all that foolishness to others, you can feel it—can't you? All up and down these mountains, magic's like a sound right on the edge of your hearing, a melody you can't quite place. Here in Tipton, it's quieter than even a whisper, and has been for the past ten years or so. That near-silence after so much background noise is the kind of thing to set you shivering, or raise the hair on the back of your neck, and most of Tipton's people don't last long as a result. Everyone's in a hurry to get going—except, that is, for the **Gray Ladies**, servants of **The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not**, and **Dell's Family**, who are looking for ways to defy them.

AROUND TIPTON

Tipton's composed of 2 bustling square miles (3 km) surrounded on three sides by pine and oak forest, with a steep mountain ridge at the eastern edge. From that ridge, the town looks gorgeous—there's nothing quite like the view of Tipton with the woods at her back as the sun goes down, dying light gleaming off the polished stone buildings. From above, you can almost ignore that the ground is dry and the trees are dying or that up close, everything stinks of coal smoke, sulfur, and decay.

Newcomers are likely to arrive by road or by train; the highway runs alongside the train tracks into town if you're coming from the north, and continues out of Tipton headed south. The train station is a modest building at the center of town—Tipton sort of cropped up around it, way back when—built from sandstone like everything else around here. The station's always full of three kinds of people: folks new to town in search of work, folks lucky enough to be leaving, and folks hard at work loading up train cars, with the last group making up the majority. See, unlike the fancy passenger station in Paradise, Tipton's train station is focused on exchanging coal for steel, and you'd best keep your feet moving and stay out of the way of the men loading and unloading freight cars.

Across Oak Avenue from the train station, you'll find the courthouse and city hall built side by side. Mayor **Ginny Books** makes it her business to know Tipton's problems, and the biggest problem hit her close to home. Her entire family has the gift, from her grandmama who could talk to ghosts to her littlest brother who always knew when a storm was due, and every single one of them is gone now. They died, disappeared, or picked up and moved away so that they *wouldn't* end up dead or disappeared. Ginny might not have grown up casting spells and setting wards, but she was taught discernment, and she knows a thing or two. First of all, the Green is hurting, and needs someone to save it. Second of all, it all started when those ladies in gray—the ones who run The Home since the old caretakers retired—came to town.

TIPTON'S FACTORIES

Of the people who come to Tipton for a steady job, most of 'em end up working at King Denim. You can spot them by their chapped hands, tinted blue from the indigo dye, or the clinging reek of sulfur used to process the fabric. The denim produced is normally deep blue, but batches dyed on the day of the new moon come out reddish-purple, and no one knows why. The supervisor, **Claude Stanton**, holds those batches back and sells them locally at a discount, rather than sending them out on the train. As such, almost everyone in Tipton owns a work shirt, a skirt, or a pair of trousers made from oddly colored denim.

Those who don't end up making denim might find themselves at Tipton Steel, a struggling little foundry that's not nearly as well-off as the one in **Passelbranch**. The hours are inconsistent and the pay is often late, due to the poor management and absentmindedness of **Malachi Brewer**. The truth is, Malachi's only so easily distracted because he hears the dead at all hours of the day and night—but only the angry dead. Every single haint yelling in his ear has a grievance they'd like to convey, and the racket makes focusing impossible.

But who's Ginny supposed to tell, when everyone left in town loves the Gray Ladies for the good work they do for the children? The families at **Blue Ridge Baptist** even partner with **Rising Creek Baptist** over in Baker's Gap to raise funds and canned goods for the orphanage every year at Christmas, and damn near everyone in Tipton knows someone who either works or volunteers at The Home. It doesn't help Ginny's case that there's no magic in Tipton anymore, either—no grannies, no speakers to the dead, no one who can reach out and touch the Green. They're like Ginny's kin: dead, disappeared, or picked up and moved away. Meaning that no one knows what it means that the Green's gone quiet, or that the woods outside of town smell like decaying leaf mulch even at the peak of summer.

No one except for **Dell's Family**, and they're staying quiet about it. They figure they'll stay alive longer that way, and get to do a bit more good.

THE HOME

Tipton's Home for the Young sits at the edge of town, the orphanage's grounds running right up into the ridge that forms Tipton's eastern boundary. It's a wood-and-stone building surrounded by apple orchards, with old trees that grow small, mealy fruit that'll rot quickly on the branches if it isn't picked. The children growing up at The Home work the orchards in exchange for room, board, a good Christian education, and the hope that they might someday be adopted. Lots of young'uns get taken in by families from faraway cities—cities even bigger than Paradise—and those families are always so eager and full of love that they don't even give their new kid time to pack up their things and say goodbye. It's like every couple of weeks someone goes out to the apple house to help make cider, and when they don't turn up at dinnertime, the matrons say it's because they've been adopted, and that could be you someday, and aren't you just so happy for them?

Blue Ridge Baptist is located around the corner from the courthouse on Great Smoky Way and holds services every Sunday evening.

Rising Creek Baptist, page 228

Dell's Family, page 236



Susanna Gibbs: level 4; leadership, persuasion, and communicating with ghosts as level 5; carries one of Minerva's iron charms on a chain around her neck

Gray Ladies, page 358

Avalon, page 197

Horned Head, page 376

Nate Wiley: level 4; explaining concepts simply, reading, and mathematics as level 5; wears one of Minerva's iron charms as a bracelet

Wooden scrying bowl: level 4; characters use this small wooden bowl by filling it with dark liquid (such as wine or juice) and gazing into it for two minutes; once per day, a character can use the bowl and receive an insight about the future or the answer to a question about their current circumstances; comes due 1 in 1d20

Daytime is for chores and lessons, like canning apple butter with Miss Susanna or practicing arithmetic with Mr. Wiley. At night, the **Gray Ladies** walk the halls checking beds and counting heads, their elongated shadows seeming to absorb the candlelight. Just knowing that the Gray Ladies make rounds every hour is enough to keep the most fearless child in bed through the night, covers pulled up over their heads.

This is the truth about how the Gray Ladies run The Home: mining is a dangerous business—it takes one accident to practically obliterate a whole town, like what happened in **Avalon**—and they follow disaster the way sharks follow shipwrecks, taking in children with no kin to speak for them, especially those with some sort of gift. The Gray Ladies can sense it, the ties to the Green in their blood, and they know it's just what **Horned Head** needs to restore his strength. They keep the children here, doing their lessons and working in the orchard, until Horned Head finds himself in this neck of the woods. On those nights, they'll take a sacrifice out to the secret cave behind the apple house for Horned Head to feast on: their energy, their blood, their bones.

The Gray Ladies started out feeding their master anyone they could find in and around Tipton with a touch of magic, but they've learned that children offer such unbridled potential, such raw and unfiltered power. At this rate, Horned Head will be back to his old health in no time.

DELL'S FAMILY

Dell's Boardinghouse is a ramshackle wooden building across the narrow unpaved Ridge Road from The Home. It's the cheapest of Tipton's three boardinghouses, but it's also the draftiest in the winter and the most likely to give you bedbugs, so it's only got a handful of permanent boarders. They all stay at Dell's for a reason: they've found people here that they can trust. They've found—or rather *built*—a family.

Like many families, Dell's Family is held together by a common secret. Every single one of them is in touch with the Green, able to hide their gifts from detection, and looking for a way to drive the Gray Ladies out of Tipton. The family consists of Susanna Gibbs, Nate Wiley, Minerva Stubbs, and Hiram Proctor.

SUSANNA GIBBS

Susanna Gibbs is a Black woman with a gnarled left hand, from bones that never set quite right after she fell down a dried-up well as a child. She knocked her head in her fall and was stuck in the bottom of the well for hours waiting for help. The experience didn't leave her quite right; she's been speaking to the dead ever since. Most ghosts are well-meaning, even if they've got a bad sense of timing, and Susanna is glad to do favors for spirits—within reason—to keep them happy.

Susanna works in the kitchen at The Home, processing apple products that are sold in town. She's never seen a ghost at the orphanage, though she's *looked*, because she was the first of Dell's Family to suspect that those ladies in gray were up to something awful. But what she's seen scares her more than a ghost ever could: she's seen the gray sisters' true faces, mouths with too many eel-like teeth, and now she's terrified of The Home at night.

Susanna isn't the oldest, but she's been at Dell's Boardinghouse the longest, and she knows the most about The Home and the Gray Ladies, and that makes her the leader of the family. She's the one who had the idea for the charms that keep everyone's power hidden, and she's the only person who can convince Minerva to take a grim situation seriously, and the only person who can convince Nate to scry at all.

NATE WILEY

Nate Wiley came to Tipton looking for work and, seeing as he's got a normal school education, it wasn't long before the Gray Ladies approached him about teaching at The Home. Susanna knew what the **wooden bowl** in his carpetbag was for and took it upon herself to warn him that all the magic is gone from Tipton, on account of everyone with the gift disappearing, and the two of them have been friends ever since.

Nate's father taught him to scry, and Nate has carried the small scrying bowl his father gave him from home to home, though he doesn't often use it. Five years ago he was scrying and saw his own death; he's only gazed into the bowl a couple of times since. Now Nate's hotheaded, always the first to throw himself into danger: he knows how he's going to die, and doesn't see a point in being afraid of anything else.

MINERVA STUBBS

Minerva is the youngest of Dell's Family and always laughing at something or other, even though Nate and Hiram think she has an awful sense of humor. For example, Minerva works at **Tipton Steel** and knows that Mr. Brewer is so scatterbrained only because he's got ghosts hounding him around the clock—a fact that sends her into giggles several times a day.

When Minnie's not laughing, her eyes are sharp and focused, and she has the kind of power that Nate describes as *subtractive* and Hiram would just call *taking things away*. Minerva herself calls it *cutting off hands*. Everyone working spells and curses draws from some larger source, usually the Inner Dark or the Green, and Minerva can sever the caster from the power source.

The **iron charms** she's made for the rest of her family are an extension of this ability. They aren't much to look at, just flakes of stolen iron, but they hide the holder's magic from those beholden to the Inner Dark.

TIPTON HUSHED MURMURS**UNZIPPED SKIN**

One of the matrons at The Home found an intact human skin in the apple orchard, looking like its wearer stepped clean out of it like any other garment. The skin matches the appearance of a child named Kenny, who is very much alive and well.

GOING GRAY

Apple butter from The Home is a big hit in Tipton—folks would happily buy it to support the orphanage, but it helps that it's downright delicious. Something's not quite right about this autumn's batch, though: everyone who's eaten a jar is turning as gray as the Gray Ladies, the color fading from their hair, clothes, and skin.

TEETH MARKS

Something's been chewing up trees on the west side of town, piling logs up like a beaver building a dam. The problem is, no beaver grows big enough to take down trees that ancient on its own, and some of the tree stumps have symbols burned into them.

HIRAM PROCTOR

Hiram Proctor is the oldest of Dell's Family, a gruff man with a thick mustache and a habit of wearing hats that are years out of fashion. He works at Tipton's grocery store, where apple goods from The Home are displayed in the front window—he takes great pride in lining up the jars and bottles just so. He also has basically a whole encyclopedia in his head: as a boy, he took it upon himself to memorize every single page of his mamaw's handwritten notes on breaking curses of various sorts, and he's always glad for an opportunity to cash in on that knowledge now.

PASSELBRANCH

Passelbranch is a little town—albeit a growing one—of about 800 people, and it's got three things going on: lumber, steel, and pigs. It was just a handful of pig farms before **Baird Steel** cropped up, and before folk got it into their heads that a man could get rich off these ancient trees. Now the Lamb family owns all the farms, and **Tweetsie** exchanges iron from **B&L No. 14** over in **Avery County** for oak from the surrounding woods. Things aren't as simple as they seem on the surface, though: the steel processed in Passelbranch is paid for with blood, and the old growth trees are going down fighting.

AROUND PASSELBRANCH

Seeing as Passelbranch's surrounded by thick forest and ridge mountains, **Tweetsie** is the easiest way to get here. The train comes into the station at the east end of town down a steep slope, with the brakes squealing and the conductor's whistle screaming, wheels sparking against the track. The station calls to mind a log cabin: it's a homey-looking place, built with the hands of Passelbranch men, and a real source of pride around here. The front windows are even leaded glass brought in from New York. Though the train only comes through the station twice a week, the smell of burning coal lingers on the east side of Passelbranch, on account of Baird Steel only 150 feet (45 m) away.

Aside from the paved road connecting the train station to the refinery, Passelbranch's an approximate grid of dirt roads—most of which don't have formal names, though the

Minerva Stubbs: level 4, strength and speed as level 5; uses an action to sever a magic wielder from the source of their abilities, an effect that lasts 20 minutes; carries her iron charm in her shoe

Iron charm: level 6; if the wearer is trained or skilled in magic, this ability goes undetected to anyone belonging to the Inner Dark; comes due 1 in 1d100

Tipton's Factories, page 234

Hiram Proctor: level 4, persuasion and deception as level 3, understanding and breaking curses as level 5; carries his iron charm in his trouser pocket

Baird Steel, page 238

Tweetsie, page 193

Mining Iron, page 220

Avery County, page 219

The Home, page 235

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines.

Cassidy Brew: level 4, logging and climbing trees as level 6, understanding magic as level 5; carries a small single-headed axe given to them by their mother, who had ties to the Green

The Green's catamount: an animate cluster of undergrowth in the shape of a mountain lion; level 6; health 22; Armor 3; two claws and a bite each inflict 6 points of damage; lashes out against those who harm the Green or get too close to her cubs, and spares those with an affinity for the Green

Mining Iron, page 220

Ira Finnerty: level 4, understanding magic as level 5

Arley Blackwell, page 218

Jimmy Lamb: level 4, intelligence and perception as level 5, interactions with pigs as level 7; once a day he can speak to a pig and receive a minor insight about the near future

Rutherford Moss: level 3; extremely anxious; carries a tin of tobacco and a book of matches

residents call them by which direction they run or which side of town they're on. You've got North-South street, the thoroughfare that cuts from the Lamb Farms jutting out around the town's northern edge to the logging camp at the south end. Then there's Front Street, which is home to all the major businesses: the schoolhouse, the boardinghouse, the general store and the grocery, the mayor and sheriff's office, and Passelbranch's two churches and cemetery. Back Street is where you'll find the smokehouse, which always smells of slow-cooking pork and burning oak, and the butcher shop. The front porch of the butcher shop has become an informal gathering place, people making conversation before and after haggling for the best and freshest cuts of meat. The back of the butcher shop, however, is a place no one wants to be: blood drains down the back stoop into the alley, drawing flies no matter the weather, and the smell is horrific.

Passelbranch proper spans 2 miles in one direction and 3 in the other (3 by 5 km), and it's easy enough to find your way around—especially with so many people willing to help if you get turned around. This town is proud Tweetsie territory, and that means looking out for newcomers and outsiders. Most everyone is involved with the refinery, the logging camp, or the pig farms in some capacity, and that's where most newcomers end up, too.

WHITESTAG LOGGING

Whitestag's the logging camp at the south end of Passelbranch, where men and boys work year round to cut down trees older than their granddaddies' granddaddies. The ancient oak sells for a high price up and down Appalachia—even higher when you head out west a ways, where the woods have been depleted. Arley Blackwell, the man from the lumber company, comes by every few weeks to check on how things are progressing. Whitestag's doing well, in his assessment. As long as there aren't too many casualties, he says, everyone will get a bonus come Christmastime.

Daily operations are handled by Rutherford Moss, a short and narrow man who's awful frightened of Mr. Blackwell, though he tries not to show it. The only thing he fears more than the boss man is whatever's been mauling

workers who go off alone from the main camp. Cassidy Brew is the only one who's seen it and lived to tell, and they say it was a catamount covered in moss that disappeared by turning back into shrubs.

The creature that's been making short work of the loggers is, in fact, a catamount made of ferns and fallen leaves that's trying to protect the Green—and her cubs. While the mama cat can travel silently through the woods, turning into plants in one place and back into a catamount a mile away, her cubs are still rooted to the ground. The babies are so new that they haven't even opened their eyes yet. The catamount's determined to protect the family nest she's built beneath a fallen oak tree, but the Whitestag loggers get closer every day.

BAIRD STEEL

Pulling minerals from the ground is dangerous work, and the men working B&L No. 14 over in Avery County sure know it. What those men might not know—the ones who live, that is—is what happens to their hard-won iron once it's sent over the state line to Passelbranch. When the iron's put in the crucible, melted down to remove impurities, the metal bleeds: the blood of everyone who's died down in B&L No. 14.

Ira Finnerty encourages the workers in his employ to do whatever they need to do to handle the grim sight of it, whether that's praying and singing hymns, spreading salt and lighting candles, or drinking moonshine and trying to forget. There's only one ritual the foreman insists on, and that's spilling blood to placate blood. A sacrifice, he says, to keep those miners and their hard deaths in the ground. So the men take turns bleeding, each one equally bearing the burden, and every bit of steel produced at the Baird foundry is hallowed by the blood of the folks that made it.

THE LAMB FARMS

It used to be that a different family owned each of Passelbranch's pig farms—until twenty years or so ago, when Jimmy Lamb came to town with enough money in his trunk to set each of those farming families up for life, and bought them all up. Jimmy grew up raising livestock over in North Carolina, and he missed tending to the

PASSELBRANCH HUSHED MURMURS

FROM AVERY COUNTY

A group of convicts working on B&L No. 14 in Avery County have escaped across the Blue Ridge to Passelbranch. They're looking to lie low at the end of their hard journey, but the haints from the iron mine have followed them.

TOO MANY CYPHERS

Jimmy Lamb's wife, Marion, collects little magic trinkets in her cellar. Some of them were handed down from her family in Paradise, more were purchased in pawnshops and speakeasies, and others were found on creek beds and forest floors. With so many cyphers in one place, they've started to act strange—overheating,

throwing showers of sparks, or speaking in odd languages. Now Marion's looking for a safe way to get rid of the ones she's least attached to, before something awful happens.

BIG GAME

Rafe Hart, one of Jimmy Lamb's farmhands, has been out in the woods hunting for bobcats. He's trying to figure out how to bring them back to life once he kills them—an experiment he'll surely extend to other species, if he succeeds—but the Green has taken offense at this misuse of their creatures. Now the woods themselves are out to get Rafe, and Passelbranch is just an obstacle in the way.

Avery County, page 219

animals even as he got rich in Paradise. Now he's running a prosperous business, he's got a good patch of land to raise his five kids, and he's got his pigs.

Jimmy's a hardworking, honest man—a real family man—who's got a special bond with his pigs. No matter how many farmhands he takes on, he goes from barn to barn every morning and night to check on all two hundred swine. He talks to them, dotes on them, sometimes falls asleep outside underneath a big pile of them. He says they're smart. He says they know things, says they tell him things. The farmhands laugh it off, but it's an uncomfortable sort of laughter.

And no matter how much Jimmy loves his pigs, he never seems bothered when it's time to slaughter them. He kills each one with his own hands.

CLINTON

Used to be, everyone thought it was sand sitting in a mussel that made it grow a pretty pearl. Now you know better, but you still tell that story when you give the girl you're smitten with a pair of tiny earrings or when you sell the one you stole to that tourist who doesn't know any better. A sweet little bit of art made by a creature, just for you.

That's 'cause you know they don't want to hear the truth—that pearls aren't pretty little gifts from the ocean. They start life as a parasite, a dangerous, insidious thing that's

got to be contained. The pearl is the locked vault, built slow and careful of the mussel's own body, that holds tight to that threat so it can never, ever escape.

That pearl? That's Clinton, too. Long ago, when this town was barely more than a babe, a parasite rode into town or was dug up or maybe it's always been here. It wasn't the kind of parasite that gets into a mussel, but that kind that gets into a man. Growing and growing, infecting everything until there's no man left, only monster.

And so the people of Clinton gathered round, built a vault of their own bodies, and locked the monster down tight. For decades, it's worked a charm.

Until now.

Now, nearly everyone's dead who was around when that parasite showed up and did its damage. Almost no one's alive who believes—*truly* believes, the way you gotta believe if you want the magic to hold—that the monster's real. Some people are murmuring it's time to break those bindings, see what's really inside that buried prison. They talk of money, of magic, of power, all the things they dream about in their secret dreams.

And no one talks about their nightmares.

No one but Granny Hazel. Ninety-some years old, she remembers. Down in the dark, saying the words, placing the bones, trapping that monster. She remembers, and sometimes in the night, she remembers so hard she screams.

Paradise, page 250

What's in the Vault?, page 241

Clinton unofficial town motto:
Come for the pearls. Stay for
the hurls.

Granny Hazel, page 241

Pearlers: level 3, finding pearls as level 4; carry one or two shucking knives

The Artrip family's huge, between kinfolk and the rest, but the only one that most people care to know about is Royce, the patriarch.

The baby of the family, Royce's granddaughter Nettie, is hoping to change all that very soon.

Royce Artrip: level 4; negotiation, intimidation, and persuasion as level 5; carries two mother-of-pearl mussel knives on his hip; keeps his trained guard dog, Dixie, with him whenever possible

Dixie: level 2, attacks and defends as level 4

Mother of Pearlers: level 3, crafting as level 5; most carry a bag of small tools, various pearls, and a few of their handicrafts

Hitch Howell: level 3, making moonshine and avoiding the law as level 5; carries a notebook full of moonshine recipes

The rumor is that Hitch Howell went off into the hills for a year and a day, and when he came back, he had some magic about him, at least when it came to making moonshine.

Miss Stacey: level 3; fortune-telling, truth-seeing, keeping secrets, and magic as level 5; carries a level 5 beechwood tabaret artifact (page 333) that sometimes lets her know impossible things

A tabaret is also known as an embroidery hoop.

Although the townsfolk might be hard pressed to admit it, the first place most of them heard whisper of the danger of the forthcoming dam was from Miss Stacey herself. She does not like to talk about the vault nor what's bound inside it.

AROUND CLINTON

Clinton's got as many borders as any other town, but only one truly matters: the Clinch River that winds along the town's southeastern side, as curvy as a sun-drowsed ribbon snake. It's in the river's low, lazy flow that the local **pearlers** spend their days looking for freshwater pearls. The river's got another important purpose too, one that gets talked about less—at least to anyone you're not bound to trust—and that's as a moonshine-running route for the town's second industry: homemade corn whiskey.

The whole of the town spreads northward from the river, with the majority of its 3,000 people living within easy walking distance of the Clinch, many right on the river's shores in tents, houseboats, and shanties. The streets beyond the river edges are long and straight and mostly named after trees—Elm, Crabapple, and Maple—to make getting around easy. The railroad, running up to three times a day, follows the river up the Great Valley for the most part, and brings in everyone from hopeful pearlers to potential buyers to those who've got money and time to burn. Everything else is about as normal as can be—a couple of cemeteries, the usual smattering of stores and workshops, a handful of moonshiners, and more than a few grannies doing their charms and healing for locals and visitors alike.

Clinton people pride themselves on lots of things—their pearls, of course, and their deeply devout population (they often say the town “boasts nearly as many churches as families,” which is more than a bit of an exaggeration, but no one's doing the math). But perhaps the thing they take the most pride in is their sense of culture and education. Between the railroad always bringing in news and people, and their plethora of newspapers (there might be as many of them as there are churches, but no one's doing that math either), the people of Clinton are well-read and world-aware. So aware, in fact, that they know there's a big dam being built just upriver, a dam that's likely to wipe out the entirety of the mussel population as soon as it goes live, no matter what the authorities say.

The one thing they're not proud of? Well, you've got to be less of a stranger to hear that story. Unless you're willing to go take

tea with Granny Hazel, and then you're likely to get more of the story than you ever wanted to hear.

SATURDAY PEARL MARKET

On Saturdays, Clinton looks less like itself and more like a young'un playing dress-up, with too-big shoes and a might too much jewelry hanging around their neck. Saturdays are trading days, when the Saturday Pearl Market opens its doors to buyers from as far away as New York City. All day long, the sights and sounds of pearl selling, buying, and haggling fill the town's streets, and every boardinghouse, hotel, and even spare mattress is full up. Every time a pearl's sale tops \$1,000, the sound of the dented church bell saved from the burnt-up First Baptist Church building peals its delight through the streets.

The market fills the whole town one way or 'nother, but the main stretch of it takes place on Riverside Drive, capped at one end by the **Artrip family's** large store and on the other by the stall of a collective of pearl artisans calling themselves **Mother of Pearlers**.

Those who don't go pearling come up with other things to offer—poppet dolls with mother-of-pearl eyes promised to bring good luck, smoked fish and potatoes wrapped in pockets of warm bread, boat repair for those traveling via the Clinch, and, on the farthest end of the street from the brand-new First Baptist Church building, mugs filled to the brim with sweet, golden corn whiskey from the town's best moonshiner, **Hitch Howell**. Most of the locals know better than to get their fortunes told by **Miss Stacey**—she told them some dark truth about themselves one time too many—but the jaspers have to pay good money to learn that lesson.

Saturday nights are full of campfires along the water, banjo tunes, fine fish dinners the likes of which most out-of-towners have never tasted—not even in their high-falutin' city establishments—and more than a few attempts at thievery. Many a buyer hires someone to stand guard over them and their newly purchased gems while they sleep, and most of the time at least, they find someone who actually does so honestly.

THE VAULT

On the far south side of town, away from the river, away from the hustle and bustle, between the town's two cemeteries—the original just called the cemetery and the other, newer, called Lost Hill—there's a place of dead trees and silence, where nothing grows and nothing goes. The ground's burnt up, black as if someone laid fire to it, and even the birds go around it on their way back north.

It's beneath this ground that the vault lies, inside of which a danger's been trapped for nigh-on a lifetime. People say there's no way whatever it was—first a parasite and then a man and then something else entirely—is still alive in there. They say there's no way it's still dangerous.

Or maybe, just maybe, they say it was never there in the first place. Maybe, just maybe, it's all a big secret to keep people out. To keep them away from some kind of special treasure. A treasure that belongs not in the ground, but in someone's hands.

That's certainly what **Nettie Artrip** thinks, and what she's convinced her followers of. Nettie might be short in stature—she's a wee thing, if you ever saw one—but she can talk a mile a minute, and it's easy to follow those big blue eyes and that curly red hair (which everyone says looks way better on her than it ever did on her granddaddy) right into the dumbest danger.

Those who share her beliefs—that it's time to open the vault, to see what's really in there, to claim it for their own—call themselves the **Followers of Joseph**, after a malaria-blinded pearler who was rumored to find pearl-filled mussels with his feet. They believe the vault is their mussel, just waiting to be opened, and they're working on a plan to make it happen.

WHAT'S IN THE VAULT?

A creature older than time itself, tinier than an atom, more powerful than the strongest of wild beasts. It looks like a man, if a man were bones and burdens, bent and bedraggled. But beneath that stolen skin, a parasite lives on, endless, waiting for the chance to spread itself to other bodies, other lives. A single touch is all it takes to enter another body, and to live beneath the human parts of it, eating away at the person that

was until there's nothing inside but bones and contagion.

Those who first encountered and captured it called it the Rotting Thing, but Granny Hazel thinks of it (when she must think of it at all, and damn that loud-mouthed Nettie Artrip for stirring that pot) as the **Blight**.

GRANNY HAZEL

Granny Hazel's seen more than most in her ninety years. She doesn't like to talk about the Blight, but now she feels like she's got to. People don't understand what's going on in there. They didn't watch it wandering around town, touching people, turning them into just more of itself. That image of her husband, Ira, and two of their daughters, shambling toward the house, arms out, calling her name with their rag-and-bone tongues.

Most people think the **vault's** metal or stone or something else from the earth. But it's not. It's bone and blood, the kind of binding you make and never talk about again, because it's unmentionable. Because the blood and bone were your loved ones, your enemies, your wave-a-hand neighbors, and your standoffish ones too. All of them who came together and said, "Yes, take mine. Build this bind." A whole cemetery of those loved ones dug up, a final offering after death. A whole town of people missing arms or legs. Some missing way more than that, laying down their whole lives to protect their kin.

They bound the Blight inside a human body, placed that body inside a cage of bone and blood, and buried it 20 feet (6 m) under. Built a cairn near the size of a mountain over it. A place for it to stay eternal.

But Granny Hazel knows it's not just any body down in that black dirt. It's the Blight wearing her husband Ira's skin like a winter coat. Her dark-eyed, handsome husband who visits her dreams, who wants to touch her skin, who asks so sweetly to be let in. The one man she never could say no to.

Now Granny Hazel gets her cane—she never did walk right even after Doc made her a newfangled foot—and goes out to do what she knows she must.

Blight: level 6, Intellect defense as level 7; health 20; spreads into the body of anyone it touches (level 6 Might roll [ignores Armor] to resist; failure knocks new host one step down the damage track and causes them to be infectious. If someone touches the new host, that person must succeed on a level 4 Might defense roll [ignores Armor]; failure causes the same effect). For each day infected, the host takes 5 points of Intellect damage and loses one random noncombat skill (if they're specialized, they become trained, and so on). After each ten-hour recovery roll, the new host can attempt to dispel the infection (a level 6 Might roll). A successful roll restores all skills and returns them to a hale state (if they aren't already).

Hale, page 141

Granny Hazel: level 4, works magic as level 6, attacks as level 3; carries a level 6 hand-carved cane (artifact) that protects her from infection, diseases, and Intellect damage

Vault: level 7; defends against nonmagical attacks as level 8

Nettie Artrip: level 4; persuasion, inspiration, and leadership as level 5; wears a heart-shaped locket passed down from her great-grandmaw Odessie

Followers of Joseph: level 3, Intellect defense as level 2

CLINTON HUSHED MURMURS

AND THE CREEK DON'T RISE

Along the southern shore of the Clinch, the Widow Blackmar recently opened a boardinghouse in the old malaria sanatorium. Only problem is that boarders say they keep seeing ghosts of the drowned in their rooms pleading for help—except the ghosts are of people who are still alive.

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

Swine farmer Bedy Riley swears her sow, Bella, has pearl-hunting skills. She wants a chance to prove Bella's abilities once and

for all by setting up a pearl-hunting contest with Bella and a bunch of the town's best pearlers, but she needs someone impartial to judge the contest.

HELL'S BANJO

One Saturday morning not so long ago, the train brought three sisters into town. Calling themselves the Broome Boys, they set up a stall in the market and started playing haunting tunes. Now people are hearing those tunes in their sleep and dreaming of filling their pockets with stones and walking into the river.

THE CUMBERLAND PLATEAU

West of the Blue Ridge and the Great Smokies, on the other side of the Great Valley, stretches the Cumberland Plateau: miles and miles of high, craggy land, covered over with hickory and pine. The edges of the highland are uneven and treacherous, with cave-mottled rock faces dropping down into valleys and streams breaking off into sudden waterfalls—and all that's before you get started on the black bears. Other places, **black bears** tend to be peaceable, more likely to run from you than lash out, but not here. No, the Cumberland Plateau's a battleground between **the Green** and **the Inner Dark**, and the bears belong to the Green. The bears that protect these wild woods won't hesitate to get their claws in you if you give 'em half a reason to.

The bears protect the plateau by killing off Things and those that are loyal to them. **Salamanders**, black-and-white spotted things no longer than your hand, protect the plateau by eating the rot that bubbles up from underneath the ground. They live under logs, in rock crevices, and near cave entrances. They look so slimy and dark that you'd think they belong to the Inner Dark themselves, but that's just camouflage. When the darkness that sleeps beneath starts to rise up, the salamanders swarm and stuff themselves full. They even say if you can catch one, it'll eat all your bad luck, too.

Towns on the plateau tend to be small, seeing as the land is hard and broken by cliffs. The biggest settlement around here is Cumberland State Penitentiary, and that's

just out of necessity, giving the guards and their families someplace to call their own. You're more likely to find folks farming just enough to get by, living on small homesteads with their kin—like the Porter family, up by the Kentucky state line.

CUMBERLAND STATE PENITENTIARY

You won't find as much coal in Tennessee as you will in Kentucky or Pennsylvania, which means that coal-mining jobs are harder to come by, which means that unions work hard to protect them. Which is, in a roundabout way, how Cumberland State Penitentiary came to be: it used to be that convicts were leased out to coal mines by the state, working in chain gangs and never seeing a cent, and they were far cheaper labor than free men. Until union men protested the practice of convict leasing—protested hard enough for word to get back to Nashville, for a bill to cross the governor's desk and make leasing imprisoned men to private businesses illegal in Tennessee, effective January 1st of 1894.

But what about all the men sentenced to hard labor? Two hundred wards of the state—which was still determined to profit off 'em, of course—with nowhere to go once their leases ran out. Those men built Cumberland State Penitentiary, along with the company town for prison employees and their families, and mined the modest coal seam on the prison's grounds.

Nowadays, that coal seam's dried up, and **Warden Beale** has turned the men toward

The Green's black bear: level 6; health 20; Armor 3; two claws and a bite each inflict 6 points of damage; territorial and motivated by protecting the woods

The Green, page 188
The Inner Dark, page 188

Lucky salamander: level 4, speed as level 6; if captured, offers an asset on the holder's next task; if harmed or killed, the offending character is hindered on their next task
Cumberland State

Warden Beale: level 3; carries keys to every door in the prison and to every set of handcuffs; also carries a chunk of cloudy glass unearthed from the sandstone quarry

Quarry glass: level 4; looking through this glass allows a character to view any hidden creatures of the Inner Dark



quarrying sandstone. The sandstone comes out of the ground golden brown with red veins, polishes up so nice that folks can pass it off as marble, and it's abundant. There's enough to sell—with that money exchanging hands until it ends up back in Nashville—and enough to rebuild the prison.

So Cumberland State Pen's really two prisons, these days. There's the old wooden building, and the half-finished stone one, and a couple of hundred imprisoned men going back and forth between the two. That new stone prison's been half finished for *years*, and progress keeps stopping and starting. Every few months, an inmate gets pulled into the solid sandstone walls like they're falling into quicksand, suffocating, until they're submerged completely.

PORTER CAVE

The entrance to Porter Cave is a crack in the ground on a stretch of pasture a stone's throw from Kentucky. If you wiggle through that opening, you'll find a wide-open underground cavern, and the **Porter Ghost** inside.

The Porter Ghost is friendly now, but she hasn't always been—and she probably won't be for long, seeing as her patience is wearing thin. The trouble started fifty years ago, when the Porter family found an abandoned homestead and decided to move in. Little Annie Porter was haunted from the first night: someone pulled the covers off her as she slept, and she thought it was her ma trying to wake her, until she saw the black dog at the foot of her bed. The dog disappeared before she could call for help.

For months, the ghost taunted her. Little Annie was hit, scratched, stuck with pins—but it's hard work making a home on this land, and no one believed her in the first place, so none of her adults did anything about it until too late. The ghost lashed out, but it wasn't Little Annie she came for. The Porter Ghost smothered Annie's father in his bed, and that sure got the family's attention. They worked together and drove the ghost out, a banishment that took twelve hours of grueling focus, but the ghost didn't go that

The Porter Ghost, page 244

Granny Anne: level 3,
storytelling as level 4

*Porter Cave cuts all the way
through to Witherville, though
parts of the passage are
submerged.*

Porter Ghost: level 5, tricks
and deception as level 6; once
a day, can rapidly decrease the
temperature of a small area

Glowing pool: Characters
who gaze into this pool for
one minute experience a brief
vision of whatever it is that will
make them truly happy, and
receive an asset on their next
Intellect task.

Buck Porter: level 4,
navigating Porter Cave as
level 5

Witherville, page 206

Harrison Crosby: level 4,
intelligence and perception as
level 3

*Cumberland State
Penitentiary, page 242
Warden Beale, page 242*

*The Inner Dark, page 188
Porter Cave, page 243*

far. She fled into the cave on the Porter property, and that's where she's stayed ever since.

Now Little Annie is **Granny Anne**, a wizened woman with two generations of descendants who call this land home, and she's befriended the ghost. It helps that the ghost got much calmer when she moved out to the cave, and seemed to take an honest interest in watching Anne grow up. Anne doesn't much remember the initial haunting or the banishment, but the ghost features in most of her childhood stories.

The cave runs deep, and though Granny Anne's bones don't let her venture underground anymore, she remembers most of the attractions and hazards. The limestone walls are damp and cold, and columns of stone stretch from the uneven floor to the ceiling. After about a mile of branching corridors, there's a **pool of water** lined with algae that glows blue-green in the dark, full of small silver fish that skim along the bottom. If you concentrate on those fish just right, and watch their movements through the glowing water, you'll go somewhere else inside your mind. You'll see the thing that makes you the happiest in all the world, just for a moment. That's the farthest into the cave that Granny Anne's ever gone: in all her exploring, she says she never needed to see anything more than that.

Her oldest grandson, **Buck Porter**, heard about the famous caves over in **Witherville**

and got it into his head that Porter Cave could be one of them. He wants to sell tickets to enter, or get reporters out here from the big-city newspapers, but Granny Anne firmly refuses. She knows Buck's just looking for a way to sneak around her, to get rich selling access to the cave and the ghost inside of it. She also knows that, while she and the ghost are friends, the ghost won't take too kindly to visitors: she'll try to kill them, or try to escape and do more damage, or both.

THE PORTER GHOST

The Porter Ghost is usually invisible, though she sometimes takes the form of a black dog. She has an affinity for children, loathes reckless and unprepared cavers, knows every single cranny of Porter Cave, and lies when in a bad mood. She's friendly with Granny Anne, but defaults to acting bristly and aloof with strangers. Though she's incorporeal, she can influence her surroundings once a day by causing a sudden chill in a small area.

The ghost's incorporeal nature is a result of her banishment when Granny Anne was a girl; the ritual diminished her power and caused her to flee into the cave. If she finds a way to break that banishment, the ghost will become tangible—and deadly.

CUMBERLAND PLATEAU HUSHED MURMURS

BLACK GOLD

Harrison Crosby was down on his luck and looking for a place to call his own, which is how he ended up owning a patch of land that really isn't worth much. But Harrison set to digging, hoping for coal, and he thinks he's found oil—it's slimy, it's black, and it's going to make him rich. He's looking for folks to help him set up an oil rig, but that underground deposit isn't petroleum at all. It's the residue that creatures from the Inner Dark leave behind when they surface, and those creatures are lurking nearby.

PRISON BREAK?

A handful of inmates from Cumberland State Penitentiary have disappeared in broad daylight. Warden Beale needs help determining whether the men merely escaped, or if something more sinister has happened to them.

OUT OF THE LIMESTONE

A few days ago, the ground beneath the Porter homestead rumbled and shook, leaving behind a new crevice in the ground. One of the younger Porters says they saw something crawl out: human shaped, with far too many arms, covered in something black and shiny that looked like grease.

Chapter 15:
VIRGINIA

The shadow of the coalfields spared much of the great state of Virginia, but that dark smolder skimmed low and landed deep in the heart of the plateau.

—Build Mama a Coffin, Episode 1: Mama Tried

The mountains and plateaus on the west edge of Virginia can be a cruel place to live, made for the stubborn, and Esau County is the perfect example: peaks and gaps with coal and even older darkness lingering underneath. It's the kind of place where you hold on tightly to your loved ones, and to those you know you can trust, as an anchor against uncertainty.

Paradise—where Virginia meets Tennessee—is an outlier: a place where the living is easy, or at least seems to be. The small city hides horrors of its own, in the form of Locke Rail's mission to control every mile of track that runs through Appalachia.

ESAU COUNTY

Esau County is a cold and harsh place: carved into the side of Stone Mountain, it gets 4 feet (1 m) of snow in the average winter—more than anywhere else in Virginia. Folks cling to their kin and their communities through all seasons, a pattern that's shaped Esau County into a set of towns and homesteads where people are generous with those they know, and wary of those they don't. Just like there isn't one story of Appalachia, there isn't one single story of Esau County; it's a sprawl of land made up of a bunch of smaller goings-on.

Aside from the cruelty of the seasons, the one thing that ties Esau County together is that these coalfields are Barrow & Locke territory. Most of the towns started off as

coal camps, and many people have sold their land and mineral rights. Some of us, like Miz Boggs over in Boggs Holler, have held out due to family ties and ties to the Green. Boggs Holler is sacred land, and Glory Ann Boggs won't let it go—not until her time comes and she's buried at home, giving her gifts back to the land so that the Green can pass that power on to future generations. And then there's Granny White, over on the White Property; she's kept her land because no one from Barrow & Locke would dare ask her to sell it to them. Funny thing is, no one can remember a time before her, and it's damn near impossible to imagine a time after her, even though she's been ancient forever.

Most folks who come to Esau County from far away arrive on the train. The passenger rail station is the Cadet Depot in Mineral City, and railroad spurs run to each of the county's mines for the purposes of carrying freight back to the main line. It's an easy drive from the train station to the county seat of Glamorgan, a common destination for visitors from within the county and from distant places. The weather is slightly more tolerable, seeing as Glamorgan's at a lower altitude, and it's got all sorts of conveniences like a new self-service grocery store, grahamite-paved roads, and a hospital. Getting around within the county is easy enough, with roads connecting each of the towns and leading out to the more remote properties. Some of those roads are best left alone after dark, unless you're looking to run

If you're a player, stop right here and check with the GM before reading any further, just in case they want to keep some of this secret for now.

Boggs Holler, page 248

The Green, page 188

The Inner Dark, page 188

Paradise, page 250

Tennessee, page 226

The White Property, page 249

Locke Rail, page 251

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines.

Mineral City is the second-biggest town in Esau County, after Glamorgan, with a population nearing 1,000

Glamorgan, page 246

Barrow & Locke, page 193

Catamount, page 347
Black bear, page 242
Not deer, page 369

Tennessee, page 226

Dorchester, page 248
J.T. Fields III, page 366
Paradise, page 250

Dr. Pratt: level 4, surgery as level 5, magic related to the Inner Dark as level 5

Miz Boggs, page 248

The Inner Dark, page 188

into a hungry **catamount**, a mama **black bear** protecting her cubs, or a herd of **not deer** covered in bleeding eyes.

Bear Creek Reservoir provides most of Esau County's water; as the name suggests, it's fed by Bear Creek, which meets up with the Clinch River and carries all the way into **Tennessee**. Bear Creek's good for fishing, too, which is why you'll find a well-stocked bait shop over in **Dorchester**—a bait shop that used to be run by **J.T. Fields III** before he moved on to **Paradise**, and you'd best believe he left his mark on the small town.

GLAMORGAN

Glamorgan sits about 3,000 feet (900 m) shy of Stone Mountain's highest peak, where the weather is milder but folks stick close to their own nonetheless. It's a town in the midst of a boom: the population's grown to 1,300 and counting, with most working men employed by Barrow & Locke in some capacity, and improvements seem to crop up overnight like mushrooms. The newly paved roads are narrow, but smooth. The hospital sees all manner of patients, from men and boys injured in the mine to parents birthing new babies. The Piggly Wiggly is one of those fancy self-service grocery stores, where you can pick out your own goods instead of handing your list over to the shopkeep. Glamorgan Baptist recently renovated, and the beautiful bell tower looks down over the town square.

Of course, all of these advancements are bankrolled by Barrow & Locke, and for a very specific purpose: keeping Glamorgan's working families loyal, and indoctrinating the next generation of miners. How can you say no to the company's demands, when the company built the hospital that saved your baby's life? Things are good in town for now, but they won't be for long. Family, you know how this story goes: the mining tunnels get deeper and deadlier, the bosses get stricter, and anyone who dares to dig in their heels is reminded that they owe a debt, and they're expected to deliver.

TOWN SQUARE

Glamorgan's town square is paved over with flagstones quarried within this great state, courtesy of Barrow & Locke. The wide-open space bounded by Main Street and First Street is lined with lanterns and often used for gatherings on summer evenings, though the pavers are liable to be slick with ice through the winter and spring. It's here that you'll find the Piggly Wiggly as well as the B&L company store, sheriff's office, and school. Town hall stands at one end and Glamorgan Baptist at the other. You can see everything happening in the square from the town hall's new clock tower or the church's bell tower, which ought to explain the prickling feeling like something's looking over your shoulder.

Barrow & Locke decorates a massive pine tree in the center of the square every Christmas. Under that tree you'll find presents for every one of Glamorgan's children, whether their daddies work for B&L or not. It's just another way of getting their hooks into the next generation of miners.

GLAMORGAN HOSPITAL

Glamorgan Hospital is small but state of the art, with modern facilities and a team of nurses working around the clock under **Dr. Pratt's** guidance. The establishment popped up about five years ago—funded, of course, by Barrow & Locke—and immediately gained folks' trust on account of Dr. Pratt's kind demeanor and the affordable, effective treatment he offers. The head doctor tells his patients a message echoed by Barrow & Locke leadership: science is more reliable than any so-called magic, and you're better off being treated in a sterile operating theater than in some granny's back bedroom. People around here believe him; to hear **Miz Boggs** tell it, she delivers fewer and fewer babies with each passing year.

But Dr. Pratt's got magic of his own, and it comes from ties to **the Inner Dark**. The doctor's got a bit of hollowness about him—you can see it in his eyes—and it's easy to spread that stain to a newborn's unprotected soul. Every baby boy he's delivered has a shadow that isn't quite right, and every single one of those boys is going to grow up wanting to work for the coal company as soon as they're big enough.



GLAMORGAN COMMUNITY THEATER

Glamorgan Community Theater is a brick building behind Glamorgan Baptist, with a block-lettered marquee over the front entrance. The theater puts on a passion play at Easter and a secular play in the fall, drawing performers from throughout Esau County to audition. The shows aren't as spectacular as anything you'd see in a big city, but they're full of heart and generally fun to watch.

Instead of charging a flat fee for tickets, the theater accepts barter, and audiences bring all kinds of items to trade for a seat in the packed auditorium. Some people bring canned goods and produce, while others bring handcrafted goods.

The plays are directed by **Woody Kerr**, who has a contentious relationship with Esau County's best actress, **Linda Young**. Casting Linda as the lead is the difference between a sold-out run and a flop, but, after every performance, Linda has an annoying habit of pawing through the bartered goods and pocketing anything she wants to keep.

ELLIE WALKER'S PLACE

Ellie Walker, a red-haired woman with a deceptively delicate appearance, splits her time between her home on Birchfield Road in Glamorgan and the **Walker House** down in **Baker's Gap**. Like her sister, **Marcie**, Ellie's a powerful witch—but where Marcie binds things, Ellie cuts them loose. She can sense the Green in all things, gifted with spotting fine details and subtle connections, and severing those ties cleanly. Ellie also carves items out of bone, such as combs or knife handles, that offer protection to the women who carry them.

Like the Walker House and her mother's **Charm School** before it, Ellie Walker's place is a safe haven for those in need: tightly warded to keep evildoers out, and welcoming enough to draw desperate folks in. The wooden house is painted a cheery yellow color with blue trim, with a wraparound porch and a magnolia tree growing in the front lawn, and if Ellie's in town, there's always something on the stove.

Ellie Walker: level 5, using and understanding magic as level 6; carries a bone-handled knife with a perpetually sharp blade, known as *Welling Wound*

Welling Wound: artifact, level 4; a knife with a bone handle, with the bone appearing to be neither human nor animal; can be used by the wielder to sever magical ties as an action, and also eases all magic-related actions by one step; comes due 1 in 1d100

Walker House, page 231

Baker's Gap, page 226

Marcie Walker, page 231

Charm School: see *The Other Walker House*, page 253

Woody Kerr: level 3, leadership and public speaking as level 4

Linda Young: level 3, performance as level 4, identifying cyphers and artifacts as level 4

ESAU COUNTY HUSHED MURMURS

PIGGY WIGGLY

Overnight, all the produce in the Piggly Wiggly has been covered in mushrooms—and the mushrooms bleed when they're picked. The manager, Raphael Schneider, needs help figuring out the cause and salvaging any stock that can still be sold.

STUDYING BEAR CREEK

A group of scientists has set up a camp along Bear Creek, studying the water levels and the fish population. Whatever they're doing there is causing a thick and growing fog

over the area that feels like bites from insect swarms when you enter it, but so far they're keeping mum as to what they're up to.

COAL UNDERWATER

The mine in South Fork has flooded, trapping a team of miners behind a sump—a passage that's completely submerged, so that the only way through is to swim. The foreman Philip Mooney has men working hard to try to free them, but they're going to die soon if they don't get food and clean water.

South Fork is a coal camp on the Kentucky state line, just a mite larger than Dorchester.

BOGGS HOLLER

Boggs Holler is a stretch of land dead even between Glamorgan and **South Fork**, owned by the Boggs family for as long as anyone around here can remember. It's on the edge of a gap where the wind blows in cold, and spring never quite seems to come until summer's right on top of you. Boggs Holler is home to a couple of cows, several chickens and goats, and Miz Boggs—who you come looking for when you need help with the dead, or things that won't die.

MIZ BOGGS

Though her legal name is Glory Ann, everyone around here knows the woman who owns Boggs Holler as **Miz Boggs**. She's reclusive, but always ready to help out if someone comes to ask for it—and she'll

know when you've arrived and whether your intentions are pure, on account of the extensive wards around the property. Miz Boggs is tall and broad, wears her hair in a long gray braid, and is known for her quick temper and powerful connection to the Green. Other grannies have gifts that run like creeks or streams, but Miz Boggs's runs like a mighty river, unstoppable and true.

Her three children, none of them with her gift, have all grown up and moved away, but Miz Boggs held fast, no matter how many times Barrow & Locke has tried to buy the land out from under her. She knows that her power comes from this land, and she wants to be buried in Boggs Holler when she dies so that the Green can pass that power on.

DORCHESTER

Dorchester was a coal camp, and then a community, but it never quite became a town. These days, it's a cheap place to live if you don't mind being a bit outside of things—and it draws people who would *rather* be a bit outside of things. It tends to be a quiet place, aside from a little excitement in the past few months.

See, aside from mining coal, folks from Dorchester fish in Bear Creek, where the trout grow fat and follow the meltwater in the spring. Dorchester's main bait shop belongs to a man by the name of **J.T. Fields III**. The bait is odd, hard to look at in ways that confuse the eye, but it's cheap and effective, and Mr. Fields has a way of dodging questions.

Glory Ann Boggs: level 4, healing and undoing curses as level 6; uses a walking stick to focus her magic

Miz Boggs's walking stick: artifact, level 5; a gnarled wooden walking stick that eases magic using the Green by two steps; comes due 1 in 1d100

J.T. Fields III, page 366

If you've listened to the podcast, you know that 1927 is a big year for Boggs Holler. Miz Boggs banishes Granny White and then dies, twice. And J.T. Fields III moves away to Paradise.

Because this game is set in the 1920s and 1930s, we've chosen to write up Boggs Holler as it was prior to 1927, with many of these characters still alive and present, to give PCs the opportunity to interact with them. If you prefer to set your game after 1927, you'll want to incorporate the changes mentioned above. Additionally, in the future, Miz Boggs's granddaughter, Delia "Deely" Hubbard, becomes the keeper of the holler.

These days, the rainbow trout in Bear Creek aren't the same, whether you fish with Mr. Fields's bait or not. Some of them have human eyes, and some have no eyes at all. Some don't have any guts or bones, just bloodless, orange-pink meat all the way through. Folks are afraid to eat them and tend to leave both the creek and the reservoir alone.

THE WHITE PROPERTY

The White Property is a large farm, with tobacco fields and a garden full of produce, where Granny White is always looking to hire new help. Whether you're looking for a seasonal position or just drifting through town on your way to somewhere else, Granny White doesn't mind. She'll give you good food, good pay, and a good place to stay in exchange for a day's work. Her farmhands live as a family and, more often than not, they're so happy working Granny White's land that they settle in and decide not to leave.

But if you see the workers in the nearby towns of Esserville or Stonega, you might notice that they don't look right. The color's been leached out of them, except for their gleaming gray eyes, and their skin hangs slack like they've lost weight due to a bad sickness. Still, they're just so joyful all the time, finding fulfillment working the land with their hands—and that's got to be worth something, right? Granny White's farmhands love her, and love working for her, even as their selfhood wears away.

GRANNY WHITE

Granny White is pale as milk, with long white hair falling loose around her shoulders. She looks awfully ancient, skinny and frail except for a round, protruding belly. She's usually found sitting in a rocking chair on her porch in a simple house dress and slippers, and she's never seen without her rose-tinted glasses. When she's *not* in her rocking chair, she moves silently, and much faster than you'd expect from a woman who looks older than time.

Odd trout: level 2; a character who eats Bear Creek's trout must make a level 2 Might defense roll; on a success, their next three tasks are eased; on a failure, they are hindered on their next three tasks

Esserville is a town of about 900 people on the bank of Bear Creek Reservoir.

Stonega, page 391

Granny White: level 5, magic of the Inner Dark as level 6



The Inner Dark, page 188

Horned Head, page 376

Locke Rail, page 251
Barrow & Locke, page 193

Tennessee, page 226

Granny White is older than time, in a way. She's a creature of the **Inner Dark** wearing a human skin, and she's been around for as long as **Horned Head**. She steals the life from her workers to feed the bottomless well of darkness inside herself, leaving them as husks without souls—vessels to be filled by the Inner Dark. If you cut one of her workers open, you'd find a mass of writhing white worms inside of their loose-hanging skin.

PARADISE

Paradise sounds like one city, but it's actually two: you've got Paradise, Virginia, on the north side of State Street, and Paradise, **Tennessee**, across the way. When Tennessee's northern border was settled by the Supreme Court in 1893, the state was forced to cede half of Paradise to the Old Dominion—which is still a sore spot for the lawmaking folks in Nashville, but a point of pride here in Virginia. With a combined population of 15,000, split about evenly over the state line, Paradise is the biggest city

around by far. You'll find all kinds of people on both sides of the divide: doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, what religion you follow, or where your family's from.

In spite of all the nightlife and excitement—the hotels, speakeasies, and dance halls—Paradise is still a small-enough town for gossip, and a small-enough town for everyone to be afraid of the same thing. The **Locke Rail** half of **Barrow & Locke** runs Paradise, with an office building on the Virginia side of State Street along with a massive rail yard, and the Locke family decides everyone's fate around here.

STATE STREET

State Street follows the state line and cuts right through the center of Paradise, and the downtown area of State Street is the busiest place in this bustling city. Whether you've arrived in town by train or by car, your journey likely starts here—and no matter what you're looking for, you're likely to find it on State Street, too.



PARADISE RAIL STATION

While all trains in and out of Paradise pass through the rail yard on the Virginia side of town, it's the train station on State Street where passengers begin and end their journeys. And if you're from a coal camp or a small farming town, the Paradise rail station might as well be New York's Union Station: it's loud, it's congested, and the folks passing through tend to be more cosmopolitan. The station's so busy that you may not even notice the **Hollow Men**, Barrow & Locke lackeys sent from **Barrow** to keep an eye on **Nathaniel Locke**.

The train station contains several food carts, as well as kiosks selling souvenirs. The vendors and staff at the ticket counters are likely to be harried and impatient, but will give you directions to where you need to go.

OFFICES OF J.T. FIELDS III

J.T. Fields III keeps an office in a narrow two-story building on the Tennessee side of State Street. No one knows exactly what he does for a living, but he's notorious in Paradise for a few reasons. He's the city's most prolific bootlegger, for one. He's always got a favor to request, but he never reciprocates more than he has to. He keeps a menagerie of magical creatures outside of town, each of them like something drawn from a fairy tale: fire-breathing geese laying golden eggs, a giant imprisoned in a limestone cave, and so on. He's acquainted with the **Railroad Man**, though no one knows quite how. And lastly, he can put you in touch with **Nathaniel Locke**, if you're bold enough to want such a thing: the two men are reluctant business partners on account of Mr. Fields's bootlegging.

If you're new in Paradise and down on your luck, Mr. Fields might offer you work—transporting liquor, feeding the geese, and so on. He'll help you get your bearings, but it's easy to get caught in his debt, and he has a way of extracting repayment.

MICK'S PAWN SHOP

This shop consists of odd items kept in glass cases—any sort of thing a person might trade away to scrape by or settle a debt. **Mick Mickelton** sees people at their most desperate, and he never judges them. He also sees folks at their most triumphant, whether

that's debtors paying back loans in exchange for valuable collateral or customers finding the perfect trinket from what Mick's got for sale.

You'll find wedding rings, watch fobs, guitars and fiddles, and the like throughout the shop. Behind the counter, where Mick is always able to keep an eye on them, is an assortment of guns. If you know what to ask for, he'll pull a metal trunk from beneath the counter: all the magic heirlooms folks have pawned off, which Mick knows better than to sell to people unqualified to use them.

PARAMOUNT THEATRE

Paramount Theatre has one screen and plays silent films every evening except for Sundays. Monday through Thursday, films are accompanied by a rotating cast of pianists. On Fridays and Saturdays, films are accompanied by **Clarence Love**, the only Paradise resident trusted to play the theater's Mighty Wurlitzer organ. Folks are more likely to come to the cinema to hear that organ resound through the walls—the entertainment on the screen is secondary to the way that music can move you from deep down, almost like church. These showings are always packed, with tickets selling out days in advance, and the audience always leaves feeling brand new.

LOCKE RAIL

Since the 1800s, Locke Rail has been joined in an occasionally uneasy marriage with the Barrow Mining Company, forming the **Barrow & Locke Mining and Railroad Combine**. While the Barrow component got its start in Barrow, Pennsylvania, the Locke side of the equation hails from Roanoke, Virginia. The rail yard and offices on Paradise's State Street weren't the hub of the Locke family's initial expansion, as they built and bought track and engines up and down Appalachia, but a sort of satellite office run by lesser members of the Locke family. It's there you'll find **Nathaniel Locke**, the heir to the Locke fortune, and the lackeys he controls with his dark power.

The truth is this: people who work for **Nathaniel Locke** don't leave. At least, they don't leave *alive*. Once you know his secrets, he's not likely to let you go.

See Appalachian Railroads on page 193 for more about the various routes and railway lines.

Hollow Man, page 362

Barrow, page 194

Nathaniel Locke, page 252

For folks in B&L employ or handling business for Nathaniel Locke, an express train from Paradise to Barrow can be arranged.

Clarence Love: level 2; characters who listen to his music for ten minutes or more gain an asset on their next task

J.T. Fields III, page 366

If your adventures are set prior to 1927, you'll find J.T. running a bait shop over in Dorchester (page 248).

Railroad Man, page 370

Barrow & Locke, page 193

Mick Mickelton: level 3, identifies cyphers and artifacts as level 4; carries a ledger of items pawned for loans

PARADISE HUSHED MURMURS

CURSED LAND

Jedidiah Wall's house on the Virginia side of Paradise has burned down to its foundation three times, and he's rebuilt it every time. Now that his house has gone up in flames for the fourth time, he's thinking of selling the place and moving on. But what he really wants is for someone to break the curse that seems to be plaguing his home.

RUBBISH TO BURN

Everyone knows that the clearing up north is a great place to burn their unwanted garbage, even though they can't seem to keep kids from playing in it, picking through the ashes and debris like scavengers. Not long ago, the kids built a humanoid figure out of the remains, and they swore it walked off into the woods by itself.

SILENT CINEMA

Everyone who saw a film at Paramount Theatre in the past week has suddenly lost their voice. Now the color is fading out of them, turning them to shades of black and gray. No one can find the movie reel, or the person who ran it, but someone said they heard voices coming out of the projector when it wasn't on.

Paramount Theatre, page 251

Nathaniel Locke: level 6;
health 20; shadow touch
inflicts 7 points of damage
(or 9 points when angry);
once per day, can use his
shadow touch on a creature
within short range

*Nathaniel Locke dies in a train
explosion on New Year's Eve
of 1935.*

Alfie Reeves: level 4
Ivy Reeves: level 4

NATHANIEL LOCKE

Nathaniel Locke is a broad-shouldered man who's always sharply dressed, with a thin mustache, dark hair, and cold green eyes. He lived in Roanoke until he was "murdered" by his fiancée in 1922—but it takes far more than being stabbed with a letter opener to kill him. Now he's based out of Paradise, where he ensures that the Locke component of Barrow & Locke runs smoothly.

Nathaniel is exacting and strict: he holds everyone in his employ to a high standard, from the Reeves brothers down to the lowliest railroad porter, and doesn't tolerate failure. People who disappoint him tend to have convenient accidents or come up missing, which the clerks working in the Locke office know well enough not to comment on—mostly, they're just hoping they won't be next. When Nathaniel is angry, the room fills with shadows and the windows become covered with frost. He can kill the object of his rage in an instant, without even touching them.

REEVES BROTHERS

Alfie and **Ivy** Reeves are twin brothers who are always on Nathaniel Locke's heels. They look identical, except for the fact that Alfie's pale blond hair is thinning and Ivy's clearly had his nose broken one too many times. Their duties range from butler to chauffeur to secretary to bodyguard: if you want an audience with Nathaniel Locke, you have to deal with the Reeves brothers first.

The Reeves boys know what Nathaniel is capable of when he's angry, and they're motivated to keep him happy so the situation doesn't get messy. Neither of them really wanted to work for him in the first place. They found themselves in the boss's service after a series of rapid promotions, from the rail yard to the Locke office, that they still don't know the reason for. Either way, they're competent and protective of Nathaniel, because that's what it takes to stay alive.

Chapter 16: WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia is the only state that's entirely within the Appalachian Mountains, and it shows. The whole state is made of mountains and rolling hills covered in ancient trees; the ground is rocky, with coal and limestone tucked underneath. The elevation drops near the Ohio River in the north—where you'll find Moundsville Prison on the state line—but on the whole, West Virginia exists at high altitude, where the air is thin and cold. When that altitude gets high enough to break through the clouds, you'll find places like **Cranberry Bog**: geography that would seem more at home at a northern latitude, but makes sense here against all odds.

TOURNIQUET

Tourniquet is what happens when the coal runs out: a square of land dotted with people too broke or stubborn to look for something better, left to their own devices. It used to be a **Barrow & Locke** company town, but B&L moved on and ceded the land to the county. Logan County's been meaning to tear it all down—and most of the buildings that are left standing won't need more than a firm shove to collapse—but no one's quite gotten around to it yet.

Tourniquet is two boarded-up saloons, two defunct brothels, and a graveyard running out of room. All of the old houses have been damaged over the years by vandals, looters, or just weather and time. The main road that

runs through town used to be smooth black asphalt, a marvel of modern engineering, but nowadays it's cracked and gray. Decades since the mines went dry, the air still hangs heavy with coal dust.

The only building that hasn't been touched by time is the Charm School, which lies up an unpaved back road that's covered in sucking mud whenever the weather turns wet. Aside from **Babylon**, it's the only place around here that hasn't been ransacked by looters, either: the wards are still intact, and impassable without Walker blood.

THE OTHER WALKER HOUSE

Miss Sheila's Charm School for Well Instructed Ladies—the Charm School, for short—is a prim house, with a high porch and sun-faded gray walls. It's the only building in Tourniquet that's not falling apart; in fact, it looks like it hasn't aged at all. That's because when the Walker women put up a roof, that place becomes a haven: tightly warded against those who would do its inhabitants harm. The **wards** on the house's doors and windows are as watchful as dogs, and as friendly too—once you gain their trust. The very walls are prone to growling, the whole place reeking of rotting vegetation, if someone unfamiliar comes close.

The late Sheila Walker was one of seven sisters, mother of seven daughters, gifted with magic few can even fathom. The Charm School was where she worked for a living, refined her craft, and raised her family.

If you're a player, stop right here and check with the GM before reading any further, just in case they want to keep some of this secret for now.

Babylon, page 254

Cranberry Bog, page 260

Barrow & Locke, page 193

Characters who attempt to enter the Charm School and aren't Sheila Walker's kin must succeed on a level 5 Intellect task or take 5 points of damage. Characters related to Sheila Walker can pass unchallenged and can bring any friendly companions with them. If characters try to harm the house, it fights back in the form of falling furniture and slamming doors; the entire building might even collapse to destroy an enemy inside its walls.



Tourniquet wasn't even really a town—because people live in a town. Tourniquet was a place where bad things went to die.

—Season 3, Episode 36: Eminent Domain

Marcie Walker, page 231
Baker's Gap, page 226
Ellie Walker, page 247
Glamorgan, page 246

Index: artifact, level 3; a pocket-sized leather-bound book that appears to have blank pages; once daily, a character can write an objective question in the book, then close it; when they reopen the book, the pages will be printed with the location where the answer can be found; comes due 1 in 1d100

Horned Head, page 376
Gray Ladies, page 358

Characters who enter Babylon must succeed on a level 4 Intellect task or they are compelled toward the stage and the Well of Remembrance. Once they stand on the stage, they relive their most frightening and painful memories. Creatures encountered in the hallucinations can cause physical harm to the characters in the real world. Characters who enter the Well of Remembrance are hindered on Intellect tasks for the next three hours.

A character who has previously entered the Well of Remembrance can, after succeeding on a level 4 Intellect task, use the Well to speak to the dead as if they had the Question the Spirits ability (page 97). A character who already has that ability eases their tasks to convince a reluctant spirit to answer questions.

Her daughters scattered in all directions, and although most are still alive—notably, **Marcie Walker** in **Baker's Gap** and **Ellie Walker** in **Glamorgan**—this house, the first Walker House, stands empty.

The ground floor is a marvel of gleaming wood floors, ivory and gold flake wallpaper, wall hangings and fine rugs, and a grand piano covered in white canvas. It's easy to imagine the sitting room and side rooms as they once were, filled with working girls and their gentleman callers, all of them done up in their finest attire. The upper floors were scrubbed and left empty when the house was closed up, but a few pieces of furniture remain in the bedrooms. The Charm School's real treasures lie downstairs.

The basement was Sheila Walker's sanctum; aside from a layer of dust, everything is just as she left it. It's there you'll find books containing generations of knowledge, including Sheila's diaries of the school's earliest days. Mixed in with the handwritten recipes, spells, and family stories is a small leather-bound book known as the **Index**: a journal that appears to be blank, but will tell you the location of the information you're looking for.

THE CHARM SCHOOL'S EARLY DAYS

In 1874, right after the mine dried up, **The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not** stayed as a boarder for a while, in a weakened and human form, preying on Sheila's working girls in an effort to regain his power. He didn't realize that the greatest prize, the most powerful witch he could possibly feed upon in Tourniquet or maybe even all of West Virginia, was right under his nose—until Sheila caught on to what he was doing and banished him. Horned Head still comes around every once in a while or sends his emissaries the **Gray Ladies**, hoping to find a Walker woman whose power he can consume.

BABYLON

While Sheila Walker prided herself on running a high-class establishment, Babylon—Tourniquet's other remaining brothel—was a darker sort of place. See, Babylon was owned by Barrow & Locke, designed to cater to the tastes of company men, and the building is cursed to this day.

The squat brick building is worse for wear, but in far better shape than the rotting wooden structures to either side of it. The only identifying mark is the word "Babylon" painted in white block letters on the banded iron door—a door that's normally locked and sealed, but might blow open as if caught in a sudden gust of wind if the building has a mind to invite you in. It'll be an invitation you're too desperate to decline: shelter from the elements, or a hiding place from whoever or *whatever* might be pursuing you. And it'll be an invitation you regret accepting, once you find your way to Babylon's heart.

The interior is lit by violet-tinted wall sconces, and the air reeks of roses left too long in stagnant water. The main room looks like any gentlemen's club, at first glance—liquor bottles with time-faded labels, a carved mahogany bar with cushioned stools, tables draped in fine linens surrounded by leather chairs and benches, a stage against

THE WELL OF REMEMBRANCE

Babylon exists outside of the waking world, entirely apart from the world of men. The Well of Remembrance is a part of the stage, and Babylon calls all comers toward it. The very building speaks: "You stand upon the precipice of the Well of Remembrance. You will proceed. Proceed. Now."

When you stand on that stage, the world falls away. You find yourself transported to your worst memories—the ones you've spent the whole rest of your life trying to run from. Loss, haints, terrors. Your purest fear, and your deepest pain.

The Well of Remembrance will let you go when it's good and done with you. You just might spend a while in the past, first.

TOURNIQUET HUSHED MURMURS

THE GRAVEYARD

Someone—or something—has been messing with Tourniquet’s graveyard. Bones push up through the soil like mushrooms after rain, though that could just be due to shallow graves and the movement of the earth. What no one can explain are the gnaw marks on the bones, made by teeth appearing too large to belong to anything in the woods surrounding town.

THE OLD BOARDINGHOUSE

A group of runaway teens has been squatting in the old boardinghouse, and one of them lit a fire that’s gotten out of control. They

need help putting it out before it destroys the building altogether. The problem is, no matter how much the kids want the fire put out, they’re compelled to help it spread.

UNDER TOURNIQUET

It’s an exaggeration that there’s no coal left under Tourniquet; the truth is, the coal that’s left is dusty and lifeless, like it’s already been burned. That isn’t enough to stop Isaac Koch, a young man who works for the county government. He’s determined to find something worthwhile in the old mine, and he’s looking for folks brave enough to go down there with him.

the far wall. It might take a longer look to spot the surgical instruments still flecked with blood, or the misplaced shackles and barbed wire. The truth is that everyone enters Babylon as either an interloper or an offering—and those invited in by an open door are most likely to be offerings, here to feed the very building with their suffering. There’s no one left to wield the scalpels, tweezers, and needles; what remains is the Well of Remembrance.

BOWER COUNTY

Bower County is a thriving coal county, dotted with mining towns owned and run by Barrow & Locke. Anytime men delve into the dark earth, they’re liable to surface carrying more than they set out looking for—and Bower County is no exception. The Inner Dark has long lingered under this land, and mining threatens to wake what sleeps beneath.

The modest town of Kayboro is where the effects of that darkness are easiest to see. In Kayboro, you’ll find Pasco #3, the county’s most profitable coal mine. You’ll also find the Church of God With Signs Following, a denomination that proves their faith by handling serpents—and those serpents are unlike the copperheads and cottonmouths you’re liable to come across in the woods. No, these serpents belong to the darkness down below, and a bite’ll turn a man into something single-mindedly eager to fight.

As both the Inner Dark and Barrow & Locke work to claim Bower County, some, like the Underwoods of Oak Mountain, hold out. Loggers, Barrow & Locke, and the Klan have been trying to run Marigold Underwood off her land for decades, but so far her ties to the Green have kept her safe. The way she sees it, the Inner Dark is just another nuisance trying to take her home from her—and there’s no way in hell it’ll succeed.

KAYBORO

Kayboro is a small yet bustling coal town with a population of about 400. Aside from the B&L No. 3 Mine and the train station, which together employ most of the able-bodied men in town, Kayboro boasts a two-story general store that takes scrip or tender, a small hotel, and three churches. There’s even a brand-new baseball field, built by Barrow & Locke in an attempt to placate workers and convince them that unionization isn’t necessary. Of course, it also just happens to be an easy way for Barrow & Locke to bring together a lot of people in a single place.

Kayboro’s the sort of town where folks are proud of their hard work, kind to those who work beside them, and always eager to help a neighbor in need—or so it used to be. These days, violence is spreading like some sort of illness, like folks don’t know any other way to settle a dispute but with their fists and teeth. Rough and rowdy brawls have become a spectacle, like dueling, and an artform, like

Oak Mountain, page 257

The Green, page 188

Barrow & Locke, page 193

The Inner Dark, page 188

Church of God With Signs Following, page 256

Rough and Rowdy, page 257



Copperhead, page 347

Dark serpent: level 3; bite inflicts 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor); a character that is bitten must succeed on a level 3 Intellect task; on a failure, they are hindered on all Intellect tasks for 24 hours or until they attack someone by biting. Whoever they bite then goes through the same process: a successful level 3 Intellect task, or all Intellect tasks are hindered for 24 hours or until they attack someone by biting.

Pastor Moon: level 3, serpent handling (including dark serpents) as level 4, defense against the Inner Dark as level 5

dancing. There's a fight in the town square almost every evening, and the loser is likely to leave with their eye put out or their ear bitten off.

Though folks haven't cottoned on yet, the source of it all is the Church of God With Signs Following, worshippers handling snakes that aren't quite snakes. If just a touch is enough to contaminate you with the Inner Dark's foulness, imagine what a bite will do.

CHURCH OF GOD WITH SIGNS FOLLOWING

The Church of God With Signs Following is a white clapboard building with a short steeple. Congregants gather every Sunday afternoon for services marked by singing, praying, and speaking in tongues—all while a basket of snakes hisses upon the altar.

Pastor Moon ends each service by handling the snakes, rolling up his shirtsleeves and allowing them to crawl over his bare arms,

and inviting any followers who want to prove their devoutness to do the same. According to the pastor, snakes are incarnations of demons. If you've got the Holy Spirit in you, you ought to be able to handle venomous snakes without a problem. If you get bitten, it means you've let the devil win your heart, and you'd better repent. And you'd better start praying for healing before the venom gets into you.

The **copperheads** normally used in services are far from harmless (if you attend a service, you'll likely spot worshippers with atrophied hands or missing fingers from previous bites), but they're maltreated and underfed after their capture, so their venom isn't strong enough to be lethal. What you've really got to worry about are the **dark serpents**: snakes whose burrows are contaminated by the Inner Dark, mutating them, making them all the more harmful. These snakes have smooth, glossy black skin. Some of them have two heads, or multiple

forked and flickering tongues; some of them have two tails. To hear Pastor Moon tell it, these are demons, and handling them is the ultimate test of faith. He attributes the fact that he's never been bitten to his godliness and virtue.

It doesn't matter whether you're right with God: touching a dark serpent leaves a film on your skin, like tar, that takes hours to wash off. If you get bitten, it's the Inner Dark that's gotten its teeth in you, contaminating you down to your very soul. Contamination that you're driven to spread, just like the serpents spread it to you—and it's a good thing brawling offers an excuse for biting. The problem is, fighting has become a sort of contagion in Kayboro, and Pastor Moon has no idea that his congregation is the cause.



"We fightin' fair? Or rough and rowdy?"

ROUGH AND ROWDY

In these remote mountain towns, where the coal company replaces local government, fighting as a form of conflict resolution isn't new. Neither is fighting rough and rowdy, where the folks settling a score agree to ignore the usual rules of honor. The goal is maximum disfigurement, and nothing is off limits. Ears, noses, fingers—any of 'em can be bitten off, but the surest path to victory is liberating an opponent's eye from the socket.

As mentioned, fighting rough and rowdy isn't new. What's new is how often folks *choose* it, just how ferocious they can be, and the crowds that gather to watch.

Most fights take place in the town square, and **Arty Hess** has started up a betting pool. If a fight's going down, he's the one most likely to know about it—and who all's involved, who's likely to win, and when it's happening.

OAK MOUNTAIN

You'll find the Underwood family about halfway up Oak Mountain, on a parcel of land that Marigold Underwood purchased with her late husband and has held onto for decades, no matter who tries to take it from her. Marigold—known as Granny Underwood—carries generations of ties to **the Green**. She marked the margins of the land herself; she found her place, and her place found her.

So when most of the other Black families in Bower County moved away to seek greater opportunity, the Underwoods stayed. When loggers tried to encroach on the property line, when Barrow & Locke offered a chest full of money for the mineral rights, when the Klan tried to burn their house down, the Underwoods stayed. Now **the Inner Dark** grows deadlier with each passing day, but the Underwoods still aren't going anywhere.

GRANNY UNDERWOOD

Granny Underwood is a woman in her seventies who's been able to sense the Green and the Inner Dark for her entire life. She's a healer, a seer, a midwife, and a speaker to the dead. She's had plenty of trouble in her time, but trouble's never had *her*. She can feel where the Green is powerful, and draw from that power; she can feel where the Inner Dark threatens to claw up from underground, and it ails her. What looks like age slowing her down in the form of rheumatism and disturbed sleep is really the sickly and lost feeling that comes with knowing that bad things are happening all over.

Though she may not always have the strength to leave Oak Mountain to set things right, Granny Underwood can tell you exactly where darkness is getting ready to strike, all up and down Appalachia. She can also provide remedies and poisons alike, drawn from the **garden** she maintains with help from her daughter, Nina.

NINA JENNINGS

Of Granny Underwood's five daughters, the only one to carry her connection to the Green is **Nina**, who's skilled in cloaking magic: workings that hide things from sight. Though Nina's in her fifties and has her own home and family, she's very protective of her mother. Visitors to the Underwood

The Green, page 188

The Inner Dark, page 188

Granny Underwood: level 5; *Might* tasks as level 3; *Speed* tasks as level 4; healing, prognostication, and speaking to the dead as level 6; once per day, can use her sickle as a focus to identify a location that is threatened by the Inner Dark

Granny Underwood's sickle: artifact, level 4; a sickle with a wooden handle and a curved metal blade; eases all attempts to identify the Inner Dark by two steps; comes due 1 in 1d100

Underwood Garden, page 259

Arty Hess: level 3; carries a ledger of contenders and wagers

Nina Jennings: level 4, understanding magic as level 5, cloaking magic as level 5

*The chest includes one cypher
per player character, and an
artifact or two.*

Tommyknockers, page 378

BOWER COUNTY HUSHED MURMURS

ON THE DIAMOND

A baseball team from nearby West Newcastle has challenged the miners of B&L No. 3 to a game. Kayboro's team is a few men short, and they refuse to forfeit—they're looking for capable players to help them defeat the competition. The winning team gets to keep a chest of weird items that miners have collected from underground over the past year.

A MINER'S DREAM

Pasco #3 over in Kayboro is a thriving mine, but something is wrong. The coal comes out of the ground soft and sludgy, it burns hotter than hot, and all the men who mine it have

the same dream: digging in the coal until they break through to the center of the earth, a sea of boiling oil that burns them alive.

WHITEHEAD MINE

After a small earthquake, the coal camp known as Whitehead—half a day's walk from Kayboro—is overrun with tommyknockers crawling out of mine vents. The creatures don't normally like being seen, but they're terrified and getting the hell out of the mine. The foreman insists that the miners keep working, but the men refuse to go underground until they know what the tommyknockers are running from.



house will have to convince her they have good intentions before they're allowed to see Granny Underwood. She often spends her days helping out in her mother's garden.

UNDERWOOD GARDEN

The Underwood family garden is the intersection of gift and skill. The land is carefully tended with the help of both magic and study, full of plants that are potentially dangerous and require great caution to grow safely. Granny Underwood's variety of herbs, powders, and tinctures all get their start in this plot. Most folks who visit looking for help have the garden to thank for the remedies they're offered.

HIGHLOWHILL

Highlowhill used to be a factory town—and it still is now, just in a different sort of way. It used to be that the Blankenship Match Company ran things around here: it was them that owned the factory, the boardinghouses, the church, the school, and so on. Then the factory workers started taking sick from the phosphorus fumes and went on strike, led by Cat Harraway. Between the 1911 strike and new federal regulations in 1912, Blankenship went under pretty quick. The company's long gone, but Cat still leads the matchgirls. They live in the old Blankenship factory and fight for women's rights all over the state, ranging from the right to work safely to the right to vote. Some of the women Cat's taken in never worked the factory floor, and some of them aren't even from Highlowhill at all, but none of that matters. What being a matchgirl *really* means is that you're with the cause.

Aside from the women who make their home in the gutted factory, most of Highlowhill's small population lives in the three boardinghouses, originally built to accommodate factory workers. The town's got its fair share of coal miners, too, but they don't dig up the kind of coal that you can sell away on the train. They're bootleggers, digging unregulated tunnels into the hill that gives the town its name. These tunnels are prone to collapsing and, most of the time, they aren't even wide enough to turn around in. Though *Barrow & Locke* has yet to establish a proper mine here, they technically

own the mineral rights—and there'll be hell to pay when they find out about all the coal that's been stolen from them.

MATCHGIRLS

The heads of strike-anywhere matches are dipped in white phosphorus—that's what makes them flammable—and the fumes from that chemical can lead to a deadly condition known as phossy jaw. Phossy jaw's uncommon enough that, in an isolated area, it's easily swept under the rug. That was not the case in Highlowhill. The phosphate used to make Blankenship matches was mined on a swath of cursed land in *North Carolina*, making it more dangerous than usual. Of the twenty women who got phossy jaw before the matchgirls went on strike, only two survived.

CAT HARRAWAY

The leader of the matchgirls, *Cat Harraway* is a short woman with curly blonde hair, missing the center of her lower jawbone. She worked in the Blankenship factory dipping matchsticks in white phosphorus from the ages of twelve to twenty, when she was the first to develop signs of phossy jaw. The factory bosses tried to get rid of her—said her appearance made her unemployable, as abscesses began to form in the bone—but Cat refused to go quietly. She'd read of matchgirls getting sick in England and Connecticut. She knew what her symptoms meant: white phosphorus was dangerous, and none of the women who'd worked beside her were safe.

She led the matchgirls in a six-month strike. When the pain got to be too much, she used a newfangled medical saw to remove a section of her own jawbone—with help from her wife, *Imelda*, who'd started to get sick herself by then. Highlowhill doesn't have a doctor, but Cat is the daughter of a surgeon and a witch, and she operated on Imelda, too, when it was time. Cat still blames herself for the slow deaths of all the women who *wouldn't* let her cut them open.

Now that the Blankenship Match Company is long gone, Cat lives in the factory with Imelda and her gang of matchgirls. She's made it her mission to ensure that no women are put through what she was put through, and her jawbone—which she carries with her everywhere—helps her. She didn't have a

North Carolina, page 212

Cat Harraway: level 4; leadership, logistics, and protective magic as level 5; carries a section of her jawbone in a leather pouch around her neck

Cat Harraway's jawbone: artifact, level 4; a curved piece of bone that's speckled with holes, so rotted as to be nearly unrecognizable as a human jaw; eases all uses of protective and healing magic by two steps and, once daily, offers an asset to the holder on a task related to public speaking or persuasion; comes due 1 in 1d100

Imelda Rowe: level 4, persuasion as level 5; wears the removed right half of her jawbone as a necklace

Imelda Rowe's jawbone: artifact, level 3; half of a human jawbone, speckled with dark rot at either end; eases persuasion and public speaking by two steps; comes due 1 in 1d20

Barrow & Locke, page 193

Genevieve Hardy: level 3

Cat Harraway's jawbone,
page 259

Imelda Rowe's jawbone,
page 259

PHOSSY JAW

It starts with pain in the jaw. Then come weeping abscesses along the jawbone, along with teeth and gums that glow in the dark. The jawbone goes necrotic and rots, right there in your head—and if the necrosis spreads to the brain, it leads to seizures and certain death.

The only way to survive is to remove the afflicted bone altogether. It comes out gnarled and pitted, looking more like pumice than like something that grows in the body. Where the phosphate from the cursed land met the courage and downright stubbornness to excise bone, protective magic formed. The removed **jawbone fragments** of the surviving Blankenship matchgirls are objects of power and superstition among the matchgirls, to this day.

touch of the gift in her youth, but the half-rotted bone enables her powerful magic.

THE BLANKENSHIP FACTORY TODAY

The Blankenship factory is a refuge for women in need, no matter why they need it, and there's always space for more. Twenty women live here permanently, with more coming and going as their situations demand it. The factory floor's been gutted of equipment, broken down into several rooms with wooden plank walls. There's a cookfire and several clotheslines hanging out back, and the matchgirls work together to keep

chores running smoothly. Everyone with something to offer contributes to keeping the factory safe, whether that means casting protective wards or prowling the perimeter with a shotgun. The walls are plastered with picket signs from the 1911 strike, as a reminder of what the matchgirls stand for: equality and respect for all women, no matter the cost.

A group of anti-suffrage activists led by **Genevieve Hardy**, daughter of the mayor of Richmond, keeps threatening to buy the factory out from under the matchgirls. Miss Hardy grew up richer than God and believes that women don't need to vote. Staying home as a wife and mother removes the time or need to be up to date on politics, and women have nothing useful to add to the discussion anyway.

CRANBERRY BOG

High in the Allegheny Mountains, where the air is sharp and cold, lie four bogs. It's the kind of terrain you'd expect to see much farther north, but the altitude and acidity have transformed this slice of Appalachia. The weather is cool and wet, prone to frosts and fog even in the dead of summer. Over a layer of peat 10 feet (3 m) thick, the land is ripe with sphagnum moss, bog rosemary, carnivorous plants, and—of course—cranberries.

The cranberries grow wild, but **Flynn Calhoun's** turned them into a business. He owns the largest of the bogs and runs Calhoun Cranberries, turning a profit selling

Flynn Calhoun: level 3

Algae beast: level 5; a human-shaped mass of wet algae, with the approximate intelligence of a dog

HIGHLOWHILL HUSHED MURMURS

THE ROAD TO HIGHLOWHILL

A female relative of a player character sends a letter asking for help. She's gotten into a disagreeable situation (which is all she's comfortable saying by post) and needs help arranging passage to Highlowhill, where she plans to join the matchgirls.

RUNOFF

Phosphorus runoff has led to overgrowing algae in the river at the bottom of the hill. The algae seems to get up and wade in the water, looking like a large man in a ghillie suit

with tremendously uncoordinated limbs. The creature made of algae seems agitated, like he's looking for something, and his search brings him closer to town with each passing night.

UNDER THE STILL

Joyce Bauer is a matchgirl who set up a moonshine still behind the Blankenship factory. She kept her no-good ex-husband's hands and heart buried under the still as a way of ensuring he wouldn't return from the grave she put him in, but something has dug up the parts and made off with them.



nature's bounty. Mr. Calhoun's not a farmer; he's a businessman from Charleston with no intention of ever wading into the bog himself—and get skunk cabbage on his fine trousers? No, thank you! Mr. Calhoun bought land that doesn't need much cultivating, and he pays seasonal workers to handle the harvest for him every autumn.

Wages at Calhoun Cranberries are good enough that folks from the surrounding area come pitch in at harvest time, even if it means missing out on foraging for berries of their own in the smaller bogs. Even if it means wading into swarms of wolf spiders, or sticking to clumps of sundew that'll try to eat the skin right off you, or falling clear into the trap of an overgrown pitcher plant.

CRANBERRY HARVEST

Cranberries are harvested from the Calhoun bog in the late fall, after the first hard frost. The harvest begins with flooding the bog, diverting water from the nearby river until the water is hip-height. Then comes Mr. Calhoun's fancy self-propelled harvester—though he's

never the one to drive it—to cut the fruit loose from the vine. Once all the cranberries are floating free in the flooded bog, there's no way to get them out of the water but to wade in and gather them with nets.

Putting on waders and gathering berries pays well, because hardly anyone would do it otherwise. The first thing you've got to be mindful of are the **wolf spiders** living among the cranberry vines. They *can* swim, but they don't much like to; they're looking for high ground, and a harvester is the highest ground they can find. Entering the flooded bog is the same as inviting the spiders to swarm.

And if you aren't afraid of spiders, you've still got the carnivorous plants to worry about. **Pitcher plants** grow large enough to eat a man alive, hiding beneath the peat so that they're hard to spot until you've damn near stepped into them. **Sundew** grows in sticky tendrils that twine around their prey in an instant, breaking flesh down into a liquid they can absorb. Every autumn, the Calhoun bog takes casualties—but at least the berries are delicious.

Wolf spider swarm: level 2, attacks as level 4; collective bites inflict 5 points of damage

Pitcher plant: level 3; spotting and avoiding the pit trap is a level 3 perception task; escaping the pit is a level 4 Speed task, with 3 points of damage dealt on each failure

Sundew: level 4; cluster of tendrils inflicts 5 points of damage and, on a failed Might roll, grabs the character and prevents them from moving away



CRANBERRY BOG HUSHED MURMURS

SKUNK CABBAGE

Loretta Wood lives with her three daughters in a cottage overlooking one of the smaller bogs. Her land is overgrown with skunk cabbage, all the way up to her front porch, and she needs help cutting it back. Under each skunk cabbage plant is a dead, headless skunk, and Loretta has no idea how they got there.

CRANBERRY BOG BODY

Last year, the Calhoun Cranberries harvesters found a body in the bog: a mummy perfectly preserved under the peat. Mr. Calhoun decided that the body was lucky and set it in a glass display case outside his office. For once, no one died during the harvest, and the superstition caught on. Now

the mummy's gone missing, seeming to have walked away on its own two legs—but that's impossible, isn't it?—and the cranberry bog community needs help finding it before the next harvest.

CRANBERRY RIVER

A colony of beavers has dammed the Cranberry River just above where it's usually diverted into the bogs for the cranberry harvest. The harvesters who attempted to clear the dam learned the hard way that the beavers are territorial, and that their teeth are awfully sharp. The beavers are under Jeb Buckley's supernatural control. Jeb lives in a small houseboat on the river and wants to drive Calhoun Cranberries out of the bog by sabotaging this year's harvest.

Flynn Calhoun, page 260

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Chapter 17: USING THE RULES

Audio clips and music designed specifically for this game can be found at:

[mymcg.info/
theoldgodsspeak](http://mymcg.info/theoldgodsspeak)

[mymcg.info/
songsofbloodanddarkness](http://mymcg.info/songsofbloodanddarkness)

Feel free to use them to add atmosphere and sound to your game.

This chapter is specifically for the game master—it covers not just the rules of the game, but how to use them as your tools. It also offers suggestions for running horror games, interacting with players, and crafting fantastic stories at the table.

While the rules are your tools to tell a story, to portray a character, and to simulate the setting, they are not the final word—you are. You are not subservient to the rules. But you do have a master. That master is fun gameplay mixed with exciting story.

THE RULES VERSUS THE STORY

At first glance, it might seem that for a story-based game, there isn't a lot of "story" in the rules. Everything from a cliff face to a ghost to a train car can be more or less summed up as a single number—their level. But the reality is that this is a story-based game *because* the rules at their core are devoid of story. A cliff face, a ghost, and a train car can be summed up as levels because they're all just parts of the story. They're all just obstacles or tools.

There aren't a lot of specifics in the rules. That's not because those kinds of specifics are to be ignored, but because those kinds of things are flavor—they are story, description, and elaboration for the GM and the players to provide. A player whose character is in a fistfight can and should describe one attack as an uppercut and another as an eye gouge, even though there's no mechanical difference. In fact, *because* there's no mechanical difference. That's what a narrative game is all about. It's interesting and entertaining, and that's why you're all sitting at the table in the first place.

If different aspects of the game—natural

elements, creatures, household objects, and so on—have distinctions, they come through as story elements, which are special exceptions to the rules. Having so few general rules makes adding special conditions and situations easier, because there is less rules tinkering to deal with. Fewer special circumstances to worry about. Less chance of contradictions and rules incompatibilities. For example, you can easily have a cliff face that's covered in snow. A ghost that has the ability to enter another being. A train car that's protected by powerful magic. These are story elements that mechanically build on the very simple base mechanics, and they all make things more interesting.

SETTING DIFFICULTY RATINGS

The GM's most important *overall* tasks are setting the stage and guiding the story created by the group. But setting the difficulty is the most important *mechanical* task the GM has in the game. Although there are suggestions throughout this chapter for various difficulty ratings for certain actions, there is no master list of the difficulty for every action a PC can take. Instead, the Cypher System is designed with the "teach a person to fish" style of good game mastering in mind. (If you don't know what that means, it comes from the old adage "Give a person a fish and they'll eat for a day. Teach a person to fish and they'll eat for a lifetime." The idea is not to give GMs a ton of rules to memorize or reference, but to teach them how to make their own logical judgment calls.) Of course, most of the time, it's not a matter of exact precision. If you say the difficulty is 3 and it "should have" been 4, the world's not over.

TASK DIFFICULTY TABLE

Task Difficulty	Description	Target No.	Guidance
0	Routine	0	Anyone can do this basically every time.
1	Simple	3	Most people can do this most of the time.
2	Standard	6	Typical task requiring focus, but most people can usually do this.
3	Demanding	9	Requires full attention; most people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
4	Difficult	12	Trained people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
5	Challenging	15	Even trained people often fail.
6	Intimidating	18	Normal people almost never succeed.
7	Formidable	21	Impossible without skills or great effort.
8	Heroic	24	A task worthy of tales told for years afterward.
9	Immortal	27	A task worthy of legends that last lifetimes.
10	Impossible	30	A task that normal humans couldn't consider (but one that doesn't break the laws of physics).

For the most part, it really is as simple as rating something on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being incredibly easy and 10 being basically impossible. (Technically, there's also a difficulty rating of 0, which means it's routine, and someone automatically succeeds at it without a roll.)

The guidelines in the Task Difficulty table, presented again above for reference, should help put you in the right frame of mind for assigning difficulty to a task.

For example, we make the distinction between something that most people can do and something that trained people can do. In this case, "normal" means someone with absolutely no training, talent, or experience—imagine your ne'er-do-well, slightly overweight uncle trying a task he's never tried before. "Trained" means the person has some level of instruction or experience but is not necessarily a professional.

With that in mind, think about the act of balance. By being careful, most people can walk across a narrow bridge (like a fallen tree trunk). That suggests it's difficulty 2. However, walking across a narrow plank that's only 3 inches (8 cm) wide? That's probably more like difficulty 3. Now consider walking across a chain strung between two trees. That's probably difficulty 5—a normal person can manage that only with a great deal of luck. Someone with some training can give it a go, but it's still hard. Of course, someone who's spent their life practicing,

like a professional acrobat, could do it easily. That's because the professional acrobat is **specialized** in balancing, making it difficulty 3 for them. They probably are using **Effort** as well during their performance.

Let's try another task. This time, consider how hard it might be to remember the name of the previous owner of a textile mill in the area where the character lives. The difficulty might be 0 or 1, depending on how long ago the character worked there and how close they were to the owner.

Let's say it was twenty years ago and the owner was only mildly memorable, so it's difficulty 1. Most people remember them, and with a little bit of effort, anyone can come up with their name. Now let's consider the name of the owner's daughter. That's much harder. Assuming the daughter wasn't well known in her own right, it's probably difficulty 4. Even people who know a little about local businesses (that is to say, people who are trained in the subject) might not be able to remember her name.

But what about the name of the daughter's first love interest? That's probably impossible. Who's going to remember the name of an obscure person's crush from twenty years ago? Basically no one. However, it's not forbidden knowledge or a well-guarded secret, so it sounds like difficulty 7. Difficulty 7 is the rating that means "No one can do this, yet some people still do." It's not the stuff of legend, but it's something you would assume people can't do. When you

Specialized, page 129
Effort, page 132

Helping, page 150

think there's no way you can get tickets for a sold-out circus, but somehow your friend manages to score a couple anyway, that's difficulty 7. (See the next section for more on difficulties 7, 8, 9, and 10.)

If you're talking about a task, the difficulty shouldn't be based on the character performing the task. Things don't get inherently easier or harder depending on who is doing them. However, the truth is, the character does play into it as a judgment call. If the task is breaking down a wooden door, an 8-foot-tall (2 m) bear should be better at it than an average human would be, but the task rating should be the same for both. Let's say that the bear's nature effectively makes it specialized in such tasks. Thus, if the door has a difficulty rating of 4, but the bear is specialized and reduces the difficulty to 2, it has a target number of 6. The human has no such specialization, so the difficulty remains 4, which gives the task a target number of 12. However, when you set the difficulty of breaking down the door, don't try to take all those differences into account. The GM should consider only the human because the Task Difficulty table is based on the ideal of a "normal" person, a "trained" person, and so on. It's humanocentric.

Most characters probably are willing to use one or two levels of Effort on a task, and they might have an appropriate skill or asset to decrease the difficulty by a step. That means that a difficulty 4 task will often be treated as difficulty 2 or even 1, and those are easy rolls to make. Don't hesitate, then, to pull out higher-level difficulties. The PCs can rise to the challenge, especially if they are experienced.

THE IMPOSSIBLE DIFFICULTIES

Difficulties 7, 8, 9, and 10 are all technically impossible. Their target numbers are 21, 24, 27, and 30, and you can't roll those numbers on a d20 no matter how many times you try. Consider, however, all the ways that a character can reduce difficulty. If someone spends a little Effort or has some skill or help, it brings difficulty 7 (target number 21) into the range of possibility—difficulty 6 (target number 18). Now consider that the character might be specialized, use a lot of

Effort, and have help. That might bring the difficulty down to 1 or even 0 (reducing it by two steps from training and specialization, three or four steps from Effort, and one step from the asset of help). That practically impossible task just became routine for that character. A fourth-tier character can and will do this—not every time, due to the cost, but perhaps once per game session. You have to be ready for that. A well-prepared, motivated sixth-tier character can do that even with a difficulty 10 task. Again, they won't do it often (they'd have to apply six levels of Effort, and even with an Edge of 6 that would cost 7 points from their Pool), and that's assuming they're specialized and have two assets, but it can happen if they're really prepared for the task (being specialized and having two steps worth of assets reduces the difficulty by four more steps). That's why sixth-tier characters are at the top of their field, so to speak.

FALSE PRECISION

One way to look at difficulty is that each step of difficulty is worth 3 on the d20. That is to say, hinder the task by one step, and the target number rises by 3. Ease the task by one step, and the target number is lowered by 3. Those kinds of changes are big, meaty chunks. Difficulty, as a game mechanic, is not terribly precise. It's measured in large portions. You never have a target number of 13 or 14, for example—it's always 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and so on.

Imprecision is good in this case. It would be false precision to say that one lock has a target number of 14 and another has a target number of 15. What false precision means in this context is that it would be a delusion to think we can be that exact. Can you really say that one lock is 5% easier to pick than another? And more important, even if you could, is the difference worth noting? It's better to interact with the world in larger, more meaningful chunks than to try to parse things so carefully. If we tried to rate everything on a scale of 1 to 30 (using target numbers and not difficulty), we'd start to get lost in the proverbial weeds coming up with a meaningful distinction between something rated as an 8 and something rated as a 9 on that scale.

Edge, page 17

Unless for some reason you tell the players directly, they'll never know if you change an NPC's stats or a task's difficulty on the fly. If you're doing it to make a better story, that's your purview.

Levels of Effort, page 132



CONSISTENCY

Far more important than that level of precision is consistency. If the PCs need to operate a mine-shaft elevator and the GM rules that it is a difficulty 3 task to do so, it needs to be a difficulty 3 task when they come back the next day to do it again (or there needs to be an understandable reason why it's not).

Consistency is key, because it allows players to make informed decisions for their characters. If they remember how hard it was to operate the mine-shaft elevator yesterday, but it's inexplicably harder today, they'll get frustrated because they tried to apply their experience to their decision-making process, and it failed them. If there's no way to make an informed decision, then all decisions are arbitrary.

Think about it in terms of real life. You need to cross the street, but a car is approaching. You've crossed the street thousands of times before, so you can look at the car and pretty easily judge whether you can cross safely or whether you have

to wait for it to pass first. If the real world had no consistency, you couldn't make that decision. Every time you stepped into the street, you might get hit by a car. You'd never cross the street.

Players need that kind of consistency, too. So when you assign a difficulty to a task, note that number and try to keep it consistent the next time the PCs try the same task. "Same" is the key word. Operating one mine-shaft elevator isn't like operating another. An old, poorly maintained, or broken mine-shaft elevator is going to be much harder to operate successfully. And, of course, if the perfect-condition (difficulty 3) elevator that the characters used yesterday is now damaged in some way, it's likely a higher difficulty, which makes sense in the logic of the world.

You'll make mistakes while doing this, so just accept that fact now. Excuse any mistakes with quick explanations about "a quirk of fate" or something along the lines of a surprisingly strong wind that wasn't blowing the last time.

Well-handled mistakes are just opportunities for surprising story moments in disguise.

While the Cypher System is about story, not rules, it is still a game, which means that the PCs (and the players) can fail.

That's why it's not accurate to think of the game as being identical to novels or movies. The system invites its own kind of storytelling. The players have to feel that there are real stakes. That if they screw up, there will be consequences—sometimes very harsh consequences. And they have to be right in that assumption.

MISTAKES

Sometimes the PCs will break down a door, and you'll realize that you rated it too low. Or the PCs will try to wade across a creek and you (and probably they) will quickly discover that the difficulty you gave the task was ridiculously high.

Don't fret.

That door was already weakened by a nearby explosion, a structural flaw, or the fact that it took damage a while back from a rampaging bear. The water was moving faster than the PCs thought at first, or the rocks were incredibly slippery. The point is, mistakes are easy to cover up. And sometimes, you can even tell your players it was just a mistake. They might even help provide an explanation if you do. It's not the end of the world.



GM intrusions, page 162

More important, most of the time, no one will notice. Should have rated a task as difficulty 3 and instead you said it was 4? Oh well. Unless the player rolls a 9, 10, or 11—which would have succeeded for difficulty 3 but not difficulty 4—it won't matter. And even if they do roll one of those numbers, who cares? Maybe the rain was really coming down that day, and it hindered their task.

The thing to take away is this: don't let the fear of making a mistake keep you from freely and quickly assessing the difficulty of a task and moving on with the game. Don't agonize over it. Give it a difficulty, call for a roll, and keep the game moving. Hesitating over a rating will be far more detrimental to the game than giving something the wrong rating.

ROUTINE ACTIONS

Don't hesitate to make actions routine. Don't call for die rolls when they're not really needed. Sometimes GMs fall into the trap illustrated by this dialogue:

GM: What do you do?

Player: I _____.

GM: Okay, give me a roll.

That's not a good instinct—at least, not for the Cypher System. Players should roll when it's interesting or exciting. Otherwise, characters should just do what they do. If the PCs tie a rope around something and use it to climb down into a pit, you could ask for tying rolls, climbing rolls, and so on, but why? Just to see if they roll terribly? So the rope can come undone at the wrong time, or a character's hand can slip? Most of the time, that makes players feel inadequate without adding anything to the story and isn't a lot of fun. A rope coming undone in the middle of an exciting chase scene or a fight can be a great complication (and that's what **GM intrusions** are for). A rope coming undone in the middle of a simple "getting from point A to point B" scene only slows down gameplay. The real fun—the real story—is down in the pit. So get the PCs down there.

There are a million exceptions to this guideline, of course. If someone's shooting at the PCs while they climb, that will likely make things more interesting and require a roll. If the pit is filled with **firedamp** and the PCs must go down and grab an item and get back up, that's a situation where you should probably set a difficulty and have a roll.

If a PC is near death, carrying a fragile item of great importance, or something similar, climbing down the rope is tense, and a roll might add to the excitement. The important difference is that these kinds of complications have real consequences.

On the flip side, don't be afraid to use GM intrusion on routine actions if it makes things more interesting. In fact, that's what many of our nightmares are made of. The character walking up to an NPC they want to impress and tripping over their own feet? Or, worse, over the NPC's dog? That could have huge ramifications for the character and the story.

OTHER WAYS TO JUDGE DIFFICULTY

Rating things on a scale of 1 to 10 is something that most people are very familiar with. You can also look at it as rating an object or creature on a similar scale, if that's easier. In other words, if you don't know how hard it would be to climb a particular wall, think of it as a creature the PCs have to fight. What level would the creature be? You could look in chapter 20 and say, "I think this wall should be about as difficult to deal with as a hexenwolf. A hexenwolf is level 4, so the task of climbing the wall will be difficulty 4." That's a weird way to do it, perhaps, but it's fairly straightforward. And if you're the kind of GM who thinks in terms of "How tough will this fight be?" then maybe rating tasks as creatures or NPCs to fight isn't so strange after all. It's just another way to relate to them. The important thing is that they're on the same scale. Similarly, if the PCs have to tackle a knowledge task—say, trying to determine if they know where a horse and rider are headed based on their tracks—you could rate the task in terms of an object. If you're used to rating doors or other objects that the PCs

Firedamp is a name for methane, a colorless, odorless, highly flammable, and highly explosive noxious gas that's often found in mines.

ADVANTAGES TO THIS SYSTEM

1. The GM makes measured adjustments in large, uniform steps. That makes things faster than if players had to do arithmetic using a range of all numbers from 1 to 20.
2. You calculate a target number only once no matter how many times the PCs attempt the action. If you establish that the target number is 12, it's 12 every time a PC tries that action. Consider this fact in light of combat. Once a player knows that they need to roll a 12 or higher to hit a foe, combat moves very quickly.
3. If a PC can reduce the difficulty of an action to 0, no roll is needed. This means that an experienced thief doesn't need to roll a die to pick someone's pocket, but the average person does. The task is initially rated the same for both, but the difficulty is reduced for the thief. There's no chance of failure.
4. This is how everything in the game works, whether it's climbing a wall, sweet-talking a neighbor, or fighting a creature.
5. Perhaps most important, the system gives GMs the freedom to focus entirely on the flow of the game. The GM doesn't use dice to determine what happens (unless you want to)—the players do. There aren't a lot of different rules for different actions, so there is little to remember and very little to reference. The difficulty can be used as a narrative tool, with the challenges always meeting the expected logic of the game. All the GM's mental space can be devoted to guiding the story.

Experience points, page 162

Ultimately what you want is for the players to interact with the situations in the game, not with the rules and numbers that represent the situation. Don't let the players get too worked up over mechanics, dice percentages, and whatnot. That doesn't drive the story and, in fact, can stall it.

GM intrusions that come as a result of a player rolling a 1 don't have to be tied to the action involved in the roll. A 1 is not a "fumble." Further, the effect of the intrusion doesn't have to be immediate.

Hollow Man, page 362

have broken through recently, the knowledge task is just a different kind of barrier to bust through.

Everything in the Cypher System—characters, creatures, objects, tasks, and so on—has a level. It might be called a difficulty instead of a level, but ultimately it's a numerical rating system used to compare things.

Everything can be rated and roughly compared to everything else in the world. (It works best to take PCs out of this equation. For example, you shouldn't try to compare a PC's tier to a wall's level.)

Last, if your mind leans toward statistics, you can look at difficulty as a percentage chance. Every number on the d20 is a 5% increment. For example, you have a 5% chance of rolling a 1. You have a 10% chance of rolling a 1 or a 2. Thus, if you need to roll a 12 or higher, you have a 45% chance of success. (A d20 has nine numbers that are 12 or higher: 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. And 9×5 equals 45.)

For some people, it's easier to think in terms of a percentage chance. A GM might think "She has about a 30% chance to know that fact about geography." Each number on a d20 is a 5% increment, and it takes six increments to equal 30%, so there are six numbers that mean the PC succeeds: 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. Thus, since the player has to roll 15 or higher, that means the target number is 15. (And that means the task is level 5, but if you've already determined the target number, you likely don't care about the level.)

GM INTRUSION

GM intrusion is the main mechanic that the GM uses to inject drama and additional excitement into the game. It's also a handy tool for resolving issues that affect the PCs but do not involve them. GM intrusion is a way to facilitate what goes on in the world outside the characters. Can the **Hollow Man** discover the PC's hiding place? Will the fraying rope hold? Will someone accidentally draw attention to the PCs at the wrong moment?

Since the players roll all the dice, GM intrusion is used to determine if and when something happens. For example, if the PCs are fighting a couple of Hollow Men, and you (the GM) know that there are more

Hollow Men nearby, you don't need to roll dice to determine if the other Hollow Men hear the scuffle and intervene (unless you want to). You just decide when it would be best for the story—which is probably when it would be worst for the characters. In a way, GM intrusion replaces the GM's die rolling.

The mechanic is also one of the main ways that GMs award **experience points** to the PCs. This means that you use experience points as a narrative tool. Whenever it seems appropriate, you can introduce complications into the game that affect a specific player, but when you do so, you give that player 1 XP. The player can refuse the intrusion, but doing so costs them 1 XP. So by refusing an intrusion, the player does not get the experience point that the GM is offering, and they lose one that they already have. (This kind of refusal is likely to happen very rarely in your game, if ever. And, obviously, a player can't refuse an intrusion if they have no XP to spend.)

Here's how a GM intrusion might work in play. Say the PCs are making their way through a caving system, looking for someone who's gone missing. They accidentally startle a group of brown bats. As the GM, you don't ask the players specifically where their characters are standing in relation to the bat swarm. Instead, you give a player 1 XP and say, "Unfortunately, you're standing right in the middle of the swarm." If the player wanted, they could refuse the XP, spend 1 XP of their own, and say, "I drop to the ground and am out of their way." Most likely, though, they'll make the defense roll that you call for and let it play out.

There are two ways for the GM to handle this kind of intrusion. You could say, "You're standing in the wrong place, so make a roll." (It's a Speed defense roll, of course.) Alternatively, you could say, "You're standing in the wrong place. The bats begin to get tangled in your hair as they fly by." In the first example, the PC has a chance to save themselves without repercussions. In the second example, they don't. Both are viable options. The distinction is based on any number of factors, including the situation, the characters involved, and the needs of the story. This might seem arbitrary or even capricious, but you're the master of

what the intrusion can and can't do. RPG mechanics need consistency so players can make intelligent decisions based on how they understand the world to work. But they'll never base their decisions on GM intrusions. They don't know when intrusions will happen or what form they will take. GM intrusions are the unpredictable and strange twists of fate that affect a person's life every day.

When player modifications (such as skill, Effort, and so on) reduce a roll's difficulty to 0 (routine and an automatic success), the GM can still use GM intrusion to negate the automatic success. The player must roll for the action at its original difficulty level or target number 20, whichever is lower.

PLAYER-AWARDED EXPERIENCE POINTS

Players who gain 1 XP as the result of GM intrusion also get 1 XP to award to another player for whatever reason they wish—maybe the other player (or their character) had a good idea, told a funny joke, lent a helping hand, or whatever seems appropriate. This means that whenever you use GM intrusion, you're actually giving out 2 XP. The ability for a player to award XP to their friends is empowering and interactive. It helps the players regulate the flow of XP so that no one is left out. It rewards good play that pleases the group as a whole, ensuring that everyone contributes to everyone else's enjoyment. It shouldn't just be the GM who decides which players have done well. Some groups will want to decide the criteria for player-awarded points ahead of time. Some will just want to play it by ear.

Variant: Alternatively, the group could combine the player-awarded points and vote at the end of a session to decide who gets how many XP. This might be the most egalitarian way to do it, but it's probably not as fun or empowering to the individual players.

USING GM INTRUSION AS A NARRATIVE TOOL

A GM can use this narrative tool to steer things. That doesn't mean railroad the players or direct the action of the game with a heavy hand. And it definitely doesn't mean screw over your players or their characters in some way. GM intrusion doesn't enable you to say, "You're all captured, so here's your 1 XP." Instead, the GM can direct things more subtly—gently, almost imperceptibly influencing events rather than forcing them. GM intrusion represents things going wrong. The bad guys planning well. Fortune not favoring the characters.

Consider this scenario: the GM plants an interesting adventure seed in a small town, but the PCs don't stay there long enough to find it. So just as they're leaving, the PCs run afoul of a witch who poisons one of them. The GM uses intrusion to say that the witch's poison will make the character debilitated unless they can find a granny or healer who can concoct a specific antitoxin. Of course, they aren't required to go back to the town where the GM's interesting adventure can start, but it's likely that they will, looking for someone to make them the antitoxin.

Some players might find intrusion heavy-handed, but the XP softens the blow. And remember, they can refuse these narrative nudges. Intrusion is not meant to be a railroading tool—just a bit of a rudder. Not an inescapable track, but a nudge here and there.

What's more, the GM doesn't need to have a deliberate goal in mind. The complication you introduce could simply make things more interesting. You might not know where it will take the story, just that it will make the story better.

This is wonderfully empowering to the GM—not in a "Ha ha, now I'll trounce the PCs" way, but in an "I can control the narrative a little bit, steering it more toward the story I want to create rather than relying on the dice" sort of way. Consider that old classic plot development in which the PCs get captured and must escape from the bad guys. In heroic fiction, this is such a staple that it would almost seem strange if it didn't happen. But in many roleplaying games, it's a nearly impossible turn of events—the PCs usually have too many ways to get out of the bad guys'

Blank-eyed men, page 351

GM intrusions can occur at any time, not just during combat. Disrupting or changing a tense interaction with NPCs can have big repercussions.

Remember, any time you give a player 1 XP for a GM intrusion, you're actually giving them 2—one to keep and one to give to another player.

This might not be true of your players, but many players rarely, if ever, spend XP to refuse an intrusion from the GM, though they regularly use XP to avoid an intrusion that comes from a bad roll. And there's nothing wrong with that. Some GMs might want to forbid using an XP to reroll a 1, but there's really no point—if you've got an idea for a good intrusion, you don't need to wait until a player rolls a 1 to use it.

clutches before they're captured. The dice have to be wildly against them. It virtually never happens. With GM intrusion, it could happen (again, in the context of the larger encounter, not as a single intrusion that results in the entire group of PCs being captured with little explanation or chance to react).

For example, let's say the PCs are surrounded by a group of **blank-eyed men** tasked with capturing one or more members of the party. One PC is badly injured—debilitated—and the rest are hurt. A few of the blank-eyed men have a large, weighted net. Rather than asking for a lot of rolls and figuring the mechanics for escape, you use intrusion and say that the net goes over the PCs who are still on their feet. The rest of the blank-eyed men have large weapons that they seem very willing to use. This is a pretty strong cue to the players that surrender is a good (and possibly the only) option. Some players won't take the hint, however, so another use of intrusion might allow the blank-eyed men to hit one of the trapped PCs on the head and render them unconscious while their friends struggle in the net. If the players still don't surrender, it's probably best to play out the rest of the encounter without more GM intrusions—using more would be heavy-handed by anyone's measure—although it's perfectly reasonable to rule that a character rendered debilitated is knocked unconscious, since the blank-eyed men are trying to take the PCs alive.

USING GM INTRUSION AS A RESOLUTION MECHANIC

This mechanic offers a way for the GM to determine how things happen in the game without leaving it all to random chance. Some bad guys are trying to smash down the door to the room where the PCs are holed up? You could roll a bunch of dice, compare the NPCs' stats to the door's stats, and so on, or you could wait until the most interesting time, have the bad guys break in, and award an experience point to the PC who tried their best to bar the door. The latter way is the Cypher System way. Intrusion is a task resolution tool for the GM. In other words, you don't base things on stats but on narrative choice. (Frankly, a lot of great GMs over the years—even in the very early days of the hobby—have run their games this way. Sometimes they rolled dice or pretended to roll dice, but they were really just choosing to manipulate things.) This method frees the GM from worrying about mechanics and looking up stats and allows them to focus on the story.

This isn't cheating—it's the rules of the game. This rule simply replaces traditional dice rolling with good game mastering, logic, and intelligent storytelling. When a PC is climbing a burning rope, and everyone knows that it will break at some point, the game has a mechanism to ensure that it breaks at just the right time.

USING (AND NOT ABUSING) GM INTRUSION

Too much of a good thing will make the game seem utterly unpredictable—even capricious. The ideal is to use about four GM intrusions per game session, depending on the length of the session, or about one intrusion per hour of game play. This is in addition to any intrusions that are triggered by players rolling a 1.



INTRUSION THROUGH PLAYER ROLLS

When a PC rolls a 1, handle the GM intrusion the same way that you'd handle an intrusion you initiated. The intrusion could mean the PC fumbles or botches whatever they were trying to do, but it could mean something else. Consider these alternatives:

- In combat, the PC's foe is not as hurt as they thought. Give the foe 5 extra points of health.
- In combat, the PC drops their guard, and the foe gets a free attack.
- In combat, reinforcements for the PC's foes show up.
- In combat (or any stressful situation), an ally decides to flee.
- In combat (or any stressful situation), an ally doesn't like the PCs as much as they thought. The ally steals from them or betrays them.
- Out of combat, the PC's pack falls open, or the sole of their shoe tears open.
- Out of combat, it begins to rain heavily.
- Out of combat, a surprise foe appears, and the scene turns into a combat.

- In an interaction, the GM introduces a surprising motive for the NPC. For example, the PCs are trying to bribe an official for information, and the official reveals that what they really want isn't money but for someone to rescue their kidnapped son.

GM INTRUSION THAT AFFECTS THE GROUP

The core of the idea behind GM intrusion is that the player being adversely affected gains an experience point. But what if the intrusion affects the whole group equally? What if the GM uses it to have a stick of dynamite catch a spark and explode, harming all the characters? In this case, if no PC is involved more than the others (for example, no single PC was frantically attempting to prevent the blast), you should give 1 XP to each character but not give any of them an extra XP to hand out to someone else.

However, this kind of group intrusion should be an exception, not the rule. GM intrusions are much more effective if they are more personal.



EXAMPLE GM INTRUSIONS

It's not a good idea to use the same events as GM intrusions over and over ("Luzanna's gun misfired *again*?"). Below are a number of different intrusions you can use.

BAD LUCK

Through no fault of the characters, something happens that is bad or at least complicating. For example:

- The floorboard beneath the PC gives way.
- A gust of wind (natural or magical) blows important papers out of the character's hand or snuffs out a candle at the wrong moment.
- A lantern flares and catches something on fire.
- The buckle of the PC's pack snaps at an inopportune time.
- The cinch on their horse's saddle breaks mid-gallop.
- The NPC that the characters need to speak with is home sick today or has disappeared for reasons unknown.
- A device (cypher or artifact) malfunctions or gives the user a bad reaction.

AN UNKNOWN COMPLICATION EMERGES

The situation was more complex (and therefore more interesting) than the PCs knew—perhaps even more than the GM knew, at least at the start. For example:

- A rabid raccoon crawls from under the deck and attacks.
- The box that holds the plans is magically warded.
- The NPC that the PCs need to befriend is allergic to the food or drink they offer.
- The NPC that the PCs try to bribe is feeling under the weather.
- The PCs find the book they need, but the pages are so brittle that if they open it, it might crumble.

AN IMPENDING COMPLICATION EMERGES

GMs can use this type of intrusion as a resolution mechanic to determine NPC success or failure. Rather than rolling dice to see how long it takes an NPC to force open a door that the PCs have jammed, it happens at a time of the GM's choosing—ideally when it would be most interesting. For example:

- The witch finishes her binding spell on one of the PCs.
- The ropes of the old rope bridge finally snap.
- The creature stalking the PCs decides it's time to make an appearance.
- The law shows up.
- The unstable ceiling collapses.
- The NPC who holds a knife to a character's throat and says, "Don't move" cuts the PC when they do, in fact, move, immediately shifting them to **debilitated** on the damage track.

OPPONENT LUCK OR SKILL

The PCs aren't the only ones with surprising tricks up their sleeves. For example:

- The PC's opponent uses a lightning-fast maneuver to dodge all attacks.
- The PC's opponent sees an opening and makes an additional, immediate attack.
- The NPC leader rallies their fighters, who all deal 2 additional points of damage for one round.
- The PC's opponent uses a cypher or similar item that produces just the right effect for the situation.
- A bit of the wall collapses in the middle of the fight, preventing the characters from chasing the fleeing NPC.

Debilitated, page 141

FUMBLES

Although you might not want every player roll of 1 to be a fumble, sometimes it could be just that. Alternatively, the GM could simply declare that a fumble has occurred. In either case, consider the following examples:

- In a fight, the PC drops their weapon.
- In a fight, the PC misses and strikes the wall, breaking or damaging their weapon.
- In a fight, the NPC hits the PC harder than usual, inflicting 2 additional points of damage or knocking them prone.
- In a fight, the PC hits an ally by accident and inflicts regular damage.
- Out of combat, the PC drops or mishandles an important object or piece of equipment.
- A companion animal stumbles into one of the PCs, hindering their next action by one or more steps.
- In an interaction, the PC inadvertently or unknowingly says something offensive.
- While crafting a cypher, the PC is distracted and creates something unexpected or has an unexpected side effect.

PARTIAL SUCCESS

GM intrusion doesn't have to mean that a PC has failed. For example:

- The PC disables the bomb before it goes off, but if someone doesn't remain and hold the detonator, it will still explode.
- The PC creates the antidote, but it will mess with the imbiber's mind for the next few weeks, causing hallucinations or nightmares.
- The PC jumps across the pit but accidentally knocks loose some stones from the edge, making the jump harder for their friend right behind them.
- The PCs manage to repair the mining elevator, but it's only a temporary fix.

PLAYER INTRUSIONS

Player intrusions give the players a small bit of narrative control over the world. However, the world still remains in the GM's purview. You can always overrule a player intrusion, or suggest a way to massage it so that it fits better into the setting. Still, because it is indeed narrative control, a player intrusion should always involve a small aspect of the world beyond the character. "I punch my foe really hard" is an expression of Effort or perhaps character ability. "My foe slips and falls backward off the ledge" is a player intrusion.

Player intrusions should never be as big as GM intrusions. They should not end an encounter, only (perhaps) provide the PC with the means to more easily end an encounter. They should not have a wide-reaching or even necessarily a long-term effect on the setting. A way to consider this might be that player intrusions can affect a single object (a floorboard snaps), feature (there's a hidden shallow spot in the stream to ford), or NPC (the vendor is an old friend). But not more than that. A player intrusion can't affect a whole village or even a whole family in that village. A rock can come loose, but a player intrusion can't create a landslide.

THE REST OF THE RULES

Remember: the rules exist to be used as tools to shape the game, the story, and the experience. When you tell a player that their character gets caught in a cave-in and gets hurt, the rules give you a way to explain just how hurt.

One way to look at it is this: the GM is the sensory input for the players. They can't know anything about what's going on in the fictional reality of the game unless the GM tells them. The rules, then, are one way to convey information to the players in a manner that is meaningful to everyone sitting at the table. The GM could say, "You're quite hurt," but the rules clarify how hurt they are. The GM could say, "You can hurl that hammer pretty far," but the rules provide a definition of "pretty far" that helps keep things consistent, moderately realistic, and understandable so the GM doesn't have to repeat things over and over.

The rules do more than that, of course. They determine success or failure for PCs and NPCs. They help define what resources

It's telling that in the Cypher System, the rules define "quite hurt" and "pretty far" very generally, intentionally leaving a lot up to the GM's storytelling abilities. A game with a less story-based approach would likely define such things far more precisely.



characters have to interact with the world (although the best resource is the players' ingenuity, and that isn't defined by the rules).

ADJUDICATING

A lot of what we're talking about here is what people sometimes call "adjudicating." Adjudicating is basically the difference between a computer game and a game run by an actual, living human being. All a computer can do (as of yet) is follow the rules. But a human can use their sense of logic (we'll discuss that in detail below) to determine whether the rules make sense for a given situation, and they can do it on a case-by-case basis. Because there's a human GM using logic, the rules for how to play the Cypher System take up only a small part of this hefty book. If the rules had to cover every imaginable situation, well, this would be a very different book.

For example, imagine that the PCs are fighting a creature that uses poison darts to knock out children and steal them from their beds. The creature tries to use the darts on

the PCs. One of the PCs is heavily armored and takes no damage from the darts—not even close. That sort of sounds like the darts just bounced off their armor. Should the poison on a dart that can't penetrate a character's armor affect that character? Probably not. But that's not an actual rule. Well, why not make it a rule? Because then suddenly anyone wearing a thick coat can't be affected by poison darts. Should that be the case? No, because the thick leather doesn't protect every area on the PC's body. It's more complex than that. Could you devise a rule to cover both situations? Probably, but why bother? The GM can make a decision based on the situation. (They can also use GM intrusion and say that a dart hit where the armor didn't offer protection—GM intrusion really does solve a lot of these issues.)

Likewise, sometimes a character who falls off a high ledge should be stunned and lose their next turn. That isn't a rule, but it makes sense—sometimes. And the key word is *sometimes*. Because sometimes the situation

At any time, it's reasonable to switch one "condition" for another. Thus, if a PC is supposed to move down one step on the damage track as the result of someone attempting to knock them out, something equally dire happens instead. This could also be the case if someone tries to blind or deafen a PC, or anything else appropriate. Conversely, an effect that normally blinds a character could just move them one step down the damage track instead.

or the context means you don't want that to happen, so you adjudicate.

A character falling from a 100-foot ledge might take 10 points of damage. That's a lot, but a fresh character with a decent amount of Might can take that and keep going. Sometimes that's okay, but sometimes it stretches our suspension of disbelief. If a player reads the rules on how much damage is dealt by falling, they might even have their character jump off a high cliff deliberately, knowing that they can take it. So you adjudicate that they don't just lose their next turn, but the fall also knocks them down a step on the damage track. That's harsh, and the player will really feel it. But they should, and it will keep them from exploiting what might seem like a hole in the rules in a way that no real person would (and no one in a story would).

Remember, it's your job to use the rules to simulate the world, even when the world is a fictional place with all kinds of strangeness. You're not bound by the rules—it's the other way around. If you come across a hole in the rules or something that doesn't make sense, don't shrug your shoulders and say, "Well, that's what the rules say (or don't say)." Fix it.

When talking about rules, sometimes people will toss around words like "game balance" or refer to rules as "broken." These concepts belong in games where players build characters using extensive rules and make a lot of choices and then pit those characters against specific challenges to see how they fare. In such a game, a challenge that is rated or designed poorly, or a character option that grants too much or too little power, can throw everything completely out of whack. Advancing and improving characters is the point of that kind of game, and the way that characters "win" is by overcoming challenges (often, by fighting). Because the Cypher System is not a game about matching PC builds against specific challenges, nor a game about advancing characters (at least not solely, and in any event, characters do not advance due to fights or overcoming challenges), these concepts really don't apply. If something seems broken, change it. If a PC ability is too powerful, make it less so. Do it as part of the story, or—perhaps even better—just be upfront with the players. "Hey, guys, this

new power of Tammie's is just too good. It's making every fight a pushover and that's not fun. So I'm going to tone down its effect. Sound okay?" An honest discussion with the players is often the best way to handle, well, just about any problem that crops up in a game. And if a player can't handle that kind of interaction, maybe you don't want them at your table anyway.

LOGIC

Running a game requires a lot of logic rather than a careful reading of the rules. For example, some things give characters a resistance to fire (almost always expressed as Armor). But there is no special rule for "fire damage" as opposed to "slicing damage" or "lightning damage." Instead, you use logic to determine whether the damage inflicted counts as fire. In these situations, there are only two times when your answer is wrong.

The first is when the answer breaks the players' suspension of disbelief. For example, something that makes a PC fire resistant should probably provide some protection against being lit on fire. If it doesn't, your answer will spoil the moment for the group.

The second wrong answer is when you're inconsistent. If you allow a PC's fireproof armor to give them some protection against a coal fire one time but not the next, that's a problem—not only because it breaks the suspension of disbelief but also because it gives the players nothing to base their decisions on. Without predictable consistency, they can't make intelligent decisions.

The Cypher System rules are written with the assumption that the GM does not need to fall back on rules for everything, either for your own sake or as a defense against the players. For example, a player might say, "I'm going to run a long distance and jump on my big friend's back. On their action, they will run a long distance. So I can move twice as far in one round. There's no rule against that, right?" It's true that there isn't a rule against that, but it makes no sense. The GM's logic rules the day here.

You shouldn't need pedantic rules to defend against the players. You and the players should work together to create a logical, consistent, and believable world and story. Players who try to use the lack of pedantry in the rules to gain unrealistic

While GMs always have notes that they put together before the game session, it's smart to have a lot of blank paper to scribble notes on during the game. You'll invariably have to make stuff up as you go, and later you might want to be able to remember what you did. Sometimes it will be a rules issue (remembering that it was a difficulty 4 jump to cross the pit, so that it will be consistent when the PCs come back that way again), and sometimes it will just be an NPC's name or some detail about them.

GMs can encourage smart players to be ready with their actions, and to know enough about how actions work so that you don't have to ask if they're using Effort or tell them to make a roll. In a perfect world, when it's Rosario's turn and you ask what she's doing, she says, "I'm going to try to hide behind that barn so the Hounds can't see me. I'm using a level of Effort, and I rolled a 14." That way, you can take the information and immediately tell her if she succeeded or not. This keeps play moving at a wonderfully brisk pace, and doesn't let talk of game mechanics bog things down.

The Hounds, page 364

and illogical advantages for their characters should revisit the basic concept of the Cypher System.

Further, the rules don't say things like "The GM decides if the NPC knows the answer to the question, or if they will answer, or how they will answer." Of course that's the kind of thing you decide—that's your role. The rules don't state that you decide if something is logical and appropriate to the story or setting any more than they state that the player decides what actions their character will take. That's just the way the game works.

Does this put more pressure on the GM? Yes and no. It means that you need to make more judgment calls—more of the adjudication described above—which can be challenging if you're new at it. But being an arbiter of what seems appropriate and makes sense is something that we all do, all day long. Look at it this way: when you're watching a television show or a movie, at some point you might say, "That seems wrong" or "That seems unrealistic." There's no difference between doing that and using logic as a GM.

In the long run, relying on logic frees the GM. No longer saddled with hundreds (or thousands) of individual rules, compatibility issues, loopholes, and the like, you are free to move ahead with the story being told by the group. You can focus more on the narrative elements of the game than on the mechanical ones. To look at it a different way, in other games GMs sometimes spend a lot of time preparing, which is almost always rules-related stuff: creating NPC stat blocks, memorizing rules subsystems that will come into play, carefully balancing encounters, and so on. A Cypher System GM does very little of that. Prepping for the game means figuring out cool storylines, weird new devices or foes, and the best way to convey the atmosphere. The mechanical elements can be handled during the game, using logic at the table.

DICE ROLLING

Using the rules involves rolling dice. If the dice don't mean anything, then everything is predetermined, and it's no longer a game by any definition—just a story being told. So the dice need to matter. But that means that sometimes a PC will fail when they would succeed if it were a story, and vice versa. That's not a flaw; it's a feature. It's what makes roleplaying games so exciting. When we're watching an action movie, we know that in the third act the hero will defeat the villain at just the right moment. But in an RPG, maybe not. It's not so predictable. That's one of the things that makes them so special.

On the other hand, things like GM intrusions sometimes trump the die rolls to help the story move along in a direction that is (hopefully) best for the game. How do you manage it all?

As you describe the action or as the PCs move about the world, the vast majority of things that happen shouldn't involve dice. Walking around, buying things at the local store, chatting with various NPCs, moving through the woods, making a campfire—these are not actions that normally require die rolls. However, it's easy to think of exceptions where rolls might be needed. How do you decide?

There are two rules of thumb.

First, don't ask for a roll unless it seems like there should be a chance of failure and a chance of success. If a PC wants to shoot their pistol at the moon, there's no need to roll, because there's no chance for success. Likewise, if they want to shoot that same pistol at a large barn from 10 feet away, there's no chance for failure. You and logic run the game, not the dice.

Second, if a creature (PC or NPC) or object would be affected in a harmful way—or, in the case of a creature, in a way that it doesn't want to be affected, harmful or not—you need to involve a die roll. Whether the action is using deception to trick someone, using a cypher to convince a spirit to help you, cutting someone with a knife, breaking down a door, or using an ability that lets you read a creature's mind, someone or something is being harmed or affected in a way that it doesn't want to be, so a die roll is needed.

Thus, someone using a power to become invisible likely doesn't require a roll. It just

works. There's really no chance of failure, and it doesn't directly affect anyone or anything other than the character becoming invisible. However, using an ability to affect the emotions of another creature would require a die roll.

Of course, sometimes a character can use Effort, skills, and assets to reduce the difficulty so there's no need to make a roll. But you, as the GM, can also waive the need for a roll. Consider a Sage who wants to use their Push ability to push away a bunch of level 1 rats. The player needs to roll only 3 or higher to affect each one, but there are twenty-four rats. You can simply say, "With a discharge of sudden energy, you're able to push all the rats away from you so that they end up in a big pile." This keeps things moving and prevents the game from coming to a dead stop while the player makes two dozen rolls. Frankly, most first-tier characters will find level 1 creatures merely a nuisance, so no drama is ruined when the PC takes them all out. Move on to another, greater challenge.

When you waive the need for a die roll, what you're effectively doing is making the action routine, so no roll is needed. In the case of the PC who uses Push, you're reducing the difficulty by one step due to circumstances: the rats just aren't that tough. That's not breaking the rules—that's using the rules. That's the way the game is meant to be played.

As an aside, this doesn't mean that the swarm of rats is a bad encounter. It would be bad in a game where it takes an hour and a half to resolve a fight that was no real challenge. But in the Cypher System? Even if the character doesn't push away every rat, an encounter like that can be resolved in five minutes. Not every encounter needs to be life-or-death to be interesting. But we'll talk about designing encounters (and the related issue of pacing) later in this chapter.

TYING ACTIONS TO STATS

Although the decision is open to your discretion, when a PC takes an action, it should be fairly obvious which stat is tied to that action. Physical actions that involve brute force or endurance use Might. Physical actions that involve quickness, coordination, or agility use Speed. Actions that involve intelligence, education, insight, willpower, or charm use Intellect.

In rare instances, you could allow a PC to use a different stat for a task. For example, a character might try to break down a door by examining it closely for flaws and thus use Intellect rather than Might. This kind of change is a good thing because it encourages player creativity. Just don't let it be abused by an exuberant or too-clever player. It's well within your purview to decide that the door has no flaws, or to rule that the character's attempt will take half an hour rather than one round. In other words, using a stat that is not the obvious choice should be the exception, not the rule.

THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

You are the eyes and ears of the players. They can't know anything about the world unless you tell them. Make sure that the information you provide is both precise and concise. (We'll discuss good description later in this chapter.) Be evocative, but not to the point that the players lose details in the language you use. Be open to answering their questions about the world around them.

Sometimes it's easy: a PC looks over the top of the hill, and you tell them what they see. Other times things are hidden, or there's a chance that they miss something important—secret doors, cloaked assassins, creatures with natural camouflage, details of significance at a crowded parade, and so on. In these cases, perhaps a roll is involved. But it's odd to ask players to roll when they haven't taken any actions. It's within the bounds of the rules, but it can be jarring. There are different ways to handle the situation: you can call for a roll, compare levels, or use an intrusion.

Sage, page 33

Push, page 35

Players initiate actions. The only time that a GM should initiate an action is a defense action, like a Speed defense roll. Because if an action is not player-initiated, how does the player know whether to use Effort or not?

Good description, page 295

Remember, most of the time, powers, abilities, devices, and so forth are written from the point of view of the characters. But the players make the rolls, not the GM. So, for example, if the circumstances call for an NPC to make a defense roll, that means a PC should make an attack roll instead.

A good rule of thumb is: players should always know why they are rolling. If you suddenly say, "Give me a roll" to see if they notice something, it's probably better either to act as if they noticed it and give them the information, or to proceed as if they didn't and then spring a surprise on them via a GM intrusion. Of course, if a player says that they're looking around carefully, that's another story entirely.

Good description is vital to a fun, engaging game. See Crafting Stories (page 293) for more on this topic.

GM Calls for Rolls: This is the most straightforward approach. It's always the best choice if a PC's action is to search, listen, or otherwise keep an eye out. If a PC is on watch while their comrades rest, call for an Intellect roll immediately and use the result if anything happens during the entire time they are guarding.

But what if the PC isn't actively looking? Let's say a pickpocket moves up behind them to try to lift a few coins, so you ask the player to make an Intellect roll with a difficulty equal to the pickpocket's level. (Arguably, they could make a Speed-based roll to see if they are quick enough to catch a glimpse—it's up to you.) Some PCs are skilled in perceiving, and that would come into play here.

Success means that you say what the character sees, and failure means that they notice nothing. However, the player knows that they had to make a roll, so they know that something was up. One way to keep players on their toes is to call for rolls when there is nothing to notice.

GM Compares Levels: You can take the player out of the equation (so as not to alert their suspicions) by comparing the PC's tier to the difficulty of the perceiving task. Ties go to the PC. You can still figure in skills and assets as bonuses to the PC's tier. So a third-tier character trained in perceiving will spot the level 4 predator stalking up behind them. This method is particularly good for determining simple results, such as whether the PC hears a shout in the distance. That kind of thing isn't worth a roll, but for some reason, you might not want to give out the information automatically. This method also rewards a perceptive character, who will hear the noise before anyone else. Don't forget to increase the difficulty for distance in such a situation.

GM Intrudes: Rarely, you can keep things to yourself and spring the knowledge of what happened as a GM intrusion. If the PC discovers that their pocket is now empty of coins, that's certainly a complication. Sometimes the "discovery" itself is a complication—for example, the character notices an argument brewing between two friends outside.

In addition, the GM is the source of knowledge about the parts of the PCs' lives that don't take place in a game session. If a character used to work for someone and needs to know the name of their former employer, you need to give it to the player (or, better yet, let the player come up with the name).

FAILURE TO NOTICE

If PCs miss a sensory detail, you should consider very carefully what to do about that. If there's a secret room off of a mining tunnel or an important clue under the kitchen table, maybe a perceptive PC should just find it (no roll required), particularly if they said they were looking. To do otherwise might mean submitting to the tyranny of the dice. Just because the PC rolled a 2, should the adventure come to a dead stop?

Well, in the first place, don't design a scenario that can come to a dead stop if the PCs botch one roll. There should always be multiple paths to success.

In the second place, consider your other options. Maybe the PCs will learn about the secret room later and they'll have to backtrack to find it. If the characters don't find the clue under the table, an NPC might—and then lord it over them with a show of superiority. If all else fails, as noted above, sometimes discovery is a complication, and you can simply foist it upon a PC through GM intrusion. In such a case, however, you might want to include a challenge. For example, the PC finds the secret room accidentally by literally stumbling into it, but their action triggers a trap.

On the other hand, perhaps in such a situation, the PCs didn't "earn" the discovery—if there was no roll, then no Effort was used and no risks were taken. That's not good. Maybe the PCs just miss out this time. Maybe they should learn to be more observant.

In other words, the answer depends on the situation. Don't hesitate to vary things. It keeps the players guessing.

GRADUATED SUCCESS

Sometimes, a GM will break away from the traditional model that governs Cypher System task resolution and allow for a graduated success. With this method, you set a difficulty as usual, but if the player succeeds at a difficulty at least one step higher, their success is better than normal. Likewise, if they fail the roll by one or two steps, they might have a partial success.

For example, a PC tracking the thieves that robbed their family looks for tracks in the woods to see if any of them came down a certain path recently. Given the terrain and the weather, the GM decides that the difficulty is 4, so the target number is 12. The player rolls a 10. This isn't enough to accomplish the task that the PC set out to do, but since they would have succeeded if the difficulty had been 3, the GM decides that the character still learns that something came down the path recently—they just aren't certain if it was thieves. The reason is that if the PC had simply been looking for tracks of any kind, the GM would

have set a difficulty of 3. Similarly, if the player had rolled a 17—a success at least one step higher—the GM would have said that not only did they find thieves' tracks, but there were five thieves, and the tracks show that they were burdened. In other words, the player would have received more information than they asked for.

In a situation where there are more results than simply success or failure, you can convey these results based on multiple difficulties. A player can state an action, and you can come up with not one difficulty but two, three, or more. For example, if the PCs try to persuade a train conductor to give them information, the GM can predetermine that he gives them one minor bit of information if they succeed at a task with a difficulty of 2, a fair bit of information if they succeed at a task with a difficulty of 3, and everything he knows on the topic if they succeed at a task with a difficulty of 4. The players don't make three different rolls. They make one roll with a scaled, graduated success.

The more information you give a player, the more intelligent a decision they can make.



As a rule of thumb, reverse-engineer the situation. If the player rolls considerably higher or lower than the target number (more than 3 away), consider what they would have achieved with a success at the difficulty they did overcome. If crafting a makeshift key to open a locked door has a target number of 18, what does the PC create if the player rolls 14? Perhaps the answer is nothing, but perhaps it's a makeshift key that works intermittently.

This system is rarely (if ever) used in combat or situations where something either works or doesn't. But when crafting an object, interacting with an NPC, or gaining information, it can be very useful. Of course, you are never required to use this model of task resolution—sometimes success or failure is all you need to know. Usually, graduated success involves going only one step higher or lower than the original difficulty, but you can be as flexible about that as you wish.

Finally, sometimes you can offer a “consolation prize” for trying. Say a PC fears that a door has been rigged with a trap. They search it but fail the roll. The GM might still reveal something about the door. “You don’t find anything special, but you do note that the door appears quite sturdy and is locked.” It’s the kind of information the GM might give automatically (think of it as difficulty 0), but it softens the blow of failure. Some information is better than none, and it makes sense that the PC will learn at least something if they study an object for a few minutes.

DEALING WITH CHARACTER ABILITIES

Many RPGs are thought of as “class and level” games because each character has a class defining their role (like fighter, thief, or priest), and they start at level 1 and gain levels as the game progresses. A lot of people might think that the Cypher System is a class-and-level game because it has things that are similar to classes (types) and levels (tiers). And that’s fine.

But here’s the real secret: it’s not tiers, types, or any of that stuff that is the key to really understanding the system.

It’s the cyphers.

The cyphers are the key to making the game work differently than other games. The Cypher

System isn’t about playing for years before a character is allowed to charm a creature, talk to objects, protect their friends from death, walk in someone’s dreams, or draw a door to travel anywhere. They can do it right out of the gate if they have the right cypher.

This system works because both the GM and the player have a say over what cyphers a character has. It’s not limiting—it’s freeing.

The easiest way to design a good game is to limit—and strictly define—PC power. Characters of such-and-such a level (or whatever) can do this kind of thing but not that kind of thing. The GM knows that the characters aren’t going to ruin everything by seeing into the past or creating a nuclear explosion.

But that’s not the only way to design a good game. What if you—the GM—decide that while it would not be so great if the PCs could see into the past (which would ruin the mystery of your scenario), it would be okay if they could blow up half a town? The Cypher System allows you to permit anything you feel is appropriate or interesting.

To put it another way, PCs who can solve every mystery and destroy every monster probably end up making the game a pushover (and thus dull), but PCs who can solve *one* mystery or destroy *one* monster won’t ruin the campaign. Cyphers allow the characters to do amazing, cool, and fun things—just not reliably or consistently. Thus, although they potentially have access to great power from time to time, they have to use it wisely.

As the GM, it’s important to remember the distinction between a character ability gained through type or focus, an ability or advantage gained through an artifact, and an ability gained through a cypher. The type and focus abilities will shape the way you expect the characters to behave, but the cyphers won’t. If a PC has the *Becomes the Beast* focus, they will likely take on a beast shape all the time—it’s what they do—so it shouldn’t catch you off guard. In a way, you should prepare for it. “Prepare” doesn’t mean that you nullify it. Don’t take away reasons for them to become their beast. That’s no fun. Turning into a beast is what they do, and if you take that away, they don’t get to do anything. (Foiling their power every once in a while is fine because

Becomes the Beast, page 85

it might add to the challenge, but it should be the exception, not the rule.) “Preparing” for their ability just means being ready when they want to call on their beast form. Present some interesting story ideas that will encourage and reward the PC for becoming a beast, be prepared when they use their ability to tackle tasks in ways you don’t expect, and be ready to reward them for using their abilities.

But with cyphers, no preparation is necessary. First of all, most of them don’t throw a wrench into anything—they just help the character deal with a situation in a faster way, giving them some healing, a temporary boost, or a one-use defensive power. Second, the PCs never end up with a cypher that you didn’t give them, so you can have as much say over their cyphers as you want. And third (and perhaps most important), when a PC pulls out a *witchball* and blows a hole in the side of a building, that’s part of the fun. You’ll have to figure out on the fly what happens next, and so will the players. That’s not ruining things—that’s what is supposed to happen. Players surprising the GM is part of the game. Cyphers just make those surprises more frequent, and in ways as interesting as you’re willing to allow.

We’ll look at designing encounters later, but for now, remember this point: no single encounter is so important that you ever have to worry about the players “ruining” it. You hear those kinds of complaints all the time. “They drew a door and it took them right to the place they needed to go without traveling through the woods” or “The players came up with a great plan and took out the main villain in one round, ruining the final encounter.”

No. No, no, no. See the woods for the trees. Don’t think about the game in terms of encounters. Think about it in terms of the adventure or the campaign. If a PC used a potent cypher to easily kill a powerful and important opponent, remember these three things:

1. They don’t have that cypher anymore.
2. There will be more foes.
3. Combat’s not the point of the game—it’s merely an obstacle. If the players discover a way to overcome an obstacle more quickly than you expected, there’s nothing wrong with that. They’re not cheating, and the

game’s not broken. Just keep the story going. What happens next? What are the implications of what just happened?

ENCOURAGING PLAYER CREATIVITY

The Cypher System is a game that places more importance on creativity than on understanding the rules. The players should succeed not because they’ve chosen all the “right” options when creating their characters but because they come up with the best ideas when facing challenges. This means that for every challenge, there should be a straightforward solution (sneak by the guard to get into the mining office) and a not-so-straightforward one (entice a *catamount* to attack a PC who is using *Wrap* or something similar as protection, point out the commotion to the guard and ask them to go help, and then sneak in while the guard’s aiding your friend). It’s not your responsibility as the GM to come up with both. The players will come up with the not-so-straightforward solutions. You just have to be willing to go with their ideas.

This doesn’t mean you have to let them succeed if they try something weird. On the contrary, the not-so-straightforward solution might end up being as hard or harder than the straightforward one. But you have to be ready to adjudicate the idea no matter what. It’s tempting to say that there’s no way to entice a *catamount* to attack, and the PCs have to get in the building the old-fashioned way (a sneak encounter).

In some situations, that might be appropriate—perhaps the PCs simply don’t have the right supplies to entice the *catamount*, or perhaps it’s mating season and the creature is otherwise engaged. But a GM has to be willing to say that sometimes it is possible and to adjudicate the details on the fly. If you don’t, and you shut down the players’ outside-the-box ideas, they will learn that the obvious solution is the only possible solution. Eventually, this will make for boring play because things will seem repetitive and too tightly structured.

The best solution is not to develop preconceived notions of how the PCs might deal with the encounters in an adventure. If they’re going to sneak into a mining office, you might note that in addition to

Catamount, page 347

Wrap, page 36

Witchball, page 329

Cyphers teach GMs to design different kinds of scenarios—ones in which the whole adventure isn't wrecked if a player has something that can solve a single problem (defeat a foe, read a mind, bypass a barrier, or whatever). There should always be more to the adventure than one linchpin encounter, obstacle, foe, or secret.

the guard, there is a small group of miners hanging around a campfire nearby laughing and telling jokes, a steam shovel somewhere nearby that's making a weird high-pitched squeal as it operates, and maybe some type of ward on the office door. But you don't know if the PCs will fight the guards, bribe them, or sneak past them. You don't know if they're going to engage the miners or the machinery in some way or how they'll deal with the ward. That's not the kind of thing you need to think about ahead of time, but you have to be ready when it comes up at the table. You should prepare for the most obvious situations—for example, predetermine the level of the guard and what their personality is like. But when a player states that their action is to look around for a catamount, that's when you take a second to consider and (particularly if they roll well for a perception task) maybe say, "Yes, as a matter of fact, there is one hunting in the nearby woods," even if no such thing had occurred to you before that moment. Or if you hadn't even realized there were woods nearby.

CYPHERS

You should think of cyphers as character abilities. This means that it is incumbent upon you to make sure that players always have plenty of cyphers to use. In the course of their travels, the PCs should find that cyphers are extremely common. And since the PCs are limited in the number of cyphers they can carry, they will use them liberally.

Cyphers can be found almost anywhere in the world. In mines, caves, and the woods. In homes, stores, and old barns. In the pockets of unsuspecting targets and among the possessions of fallen foes. They can be found in creature's dens, in a scrapyard, or in a box of stuff in someone's attic. They are offered as rewards by people who are grateful for the PCs' help.

Some adventures will offer more cyphers than others. Still, as a rule of thumb, in any given adventure, a character should use at least as many cyphers as they can carry. This means they should find that number of cyphers in that same amount of time (give or take). Thus, you can simply add up the



number of cyphers the PCs can carry, and on average, they should find at least that many cyphers in a given adventure.

If your players are typical, they will use the more obvious cyphers liberally but hold onto the slightly weirder ones. A cypher that does damage like **black lung** or that heals like a **blue moon pie** will get used quickly, but more narrative cyphers like **augury** or **blackout creek** will linger longer on their character sheets. Find ways to help players use these cyphers, if you can, by making opportunities that invite creativity and outside-the-box thinking.

As with everything else in the game, it's intentionally very easy for the GM to create new cyphers. Just think of the effect and how to express it as a game advantage. Two kinds of cyphers exist when it comes to effect: those that allow the user to do something better, and those that allow the user to do something they couldn't do otherwise.

The first group includes everything that eases a task (including defense tasks). The second group includes things that grant new abilities, such as flight, a new means of attack, the ability to see what's going on in a remote location, or any number of other powers.

A few more important notes about devising new cyphers:

- Cyphers should be single-use items. The PCs use them up and find new ones.
- Cyphers should be potent. A minor ability isn't worth the trouble. If an attack cypher isn't as good as a regular weapon, why bother with it?
- Cyphers should be temporary. Typically, a power is used once. Abilities or advantages that have a duration last from ten minutes to 24 hours (at most).



ARTIFACTS

In terms of the narrative, artifacts are a lot like cyphers, except that they're much rarer and most are not one-use items. Mechanically, they serve a very different purpose. It's assumed that characters are exploring with some cyphers at their disposal. Artifacts, however, are added abilities that make characters broader, deeper, and often more powerful. They aren't assumed—they're extra.

The powers granted by artifacts are more like the abilities gained from a character's type or focus in that they change the way the PC is played overall. The difference between an artifact and a type or focus ability is that almost all artifacts are temporary. They last longer than cyphers do, but because they have a come due roll, any use could be their last (or at least their last for a while).

Like cyphers, then, artifacts are a way for the GM to play a role in the development of the characters. Although armor, weapons, and the like are fine, special capabilities—such as creating a duplicate of yourself or talking to the dead—can really change the way the PCs interact with the world and how they deal with challenges. Some of these abilities enable the actions you want the PCs to take. For example, if you want them to have an adventure that takes place deep underground, like an abandoned mining tunnel, provide them with artifacts (or cyphers) that allow them to see in the dark, breathe contaminated air, and be warned of incoming dangers.

Also like cyphers, artifacts are simple for the GM to create. The only difference with artifacts is that you give them a **come due** roll, using any numbers on a d6, d10, d20, or d100. If you want the artifact to be used only a few times, give it a come due roll of 1 in 1d6, 1 or 2 in 1d10, or even 1 or 2 in 1d6. If you want the PCs to use it over and over, a come due roll of 1 in 1d100 more or less means that they can use it freely without worrying too much.

Additionally, when creating an artifact you might consider what the cost will be of the artifact coming due. Ideally, the come due cost is tied into the artifact's origin or use, perhaps along with the story of the PC or the group. You can always change this later if a more interesting idea comes along by the time the artifact comes due.

Black lung, page 316
Blue moon pie, page 316
Augury, page 315
Blackout creek, page 316

It's all right if players think of cyphers as equipment or treasure. You should choose points in the course of the story that are appropriate for awarding cyphers, especially if the PCs aren't at their full capacity.

In a typical campaign, each PC probably owns one artifact by the time they're tier 2 or 3, and another by the time they're tier 4 or 5.

Come due, page 331

The PCs shouldn't get too attached to their devices. Cyphers are "fire and forget" items, expendable and easily replaced. Even most artifacts only last for a while before they come due. While these items are obviously an important part of the game, what characters can do themselves is more important. Those are the abilities they can always rely on.

*Chapter 9: Experience Points,
page 162*

*Experience point advance,
page 160*

Help Your Neighbor, page 172

SKILLS AND OTHER ABILITIES

Sometimes, the rules speak directly to character creativity. For example, players can make up their own skills.

It's possible to have a skill called "mining" that makes a character better at mining ores, and another skill called "digging" that makes a character better at mining ores and performing other digging actions as well. This might seem unequal at first, but the point is to let players create precisely the characters they want. Should you let a character create a skill called "doing things" that makes them better at everything? Of course not. The GM is the final arbiter not only of logic but also of the spirit of the rules, and having one or two single skills that cover every contingency is clearly not in the spirit.

It's important that players play the character they want. This concept is supported not only with the open-ended skill system but also with the ability to get an **experience point advance** to tailor a character further. Likewise, the GM should be open to allowing a player to make small modifications to refine their character. In many cases, particularly ones that don't involve stat Pools, Armor, damage inflicted, or the costs of Effort or special abilities, the answer from the GM should probably be "Sure, why not?" If a PC ends up being really good at a particular skill—better than they "should" be—what's the harm? If Minerva can swim incredibly well, how does that hurt the game in terms of the play experience or the story that develops? It doesn't. If Wayne can pick practically any mundane lock he finds, why is that a bad thing? In fact, it's probably good for the game—there's likely something interesting on the other sides of those doors.

In a way, this is no different than adjudicating a not-so-straightforward solution to a challenge. Sometimes you have to say, "No, that's not possible." But sometimes, if it makes sense, open yourself up to the possibility.

CHARACTER ARCS

Character arcs encourage players to be proactive and create their own goals, with their own definitions of success and failure.

Chapter 9 has more details about using character arcs and offers plenty of sample arcs for the PCs.

It's the spirit of character arcs that's important, not the specific rules. Because the arcs consist of broad sets of guidelines for handling a potentially limitless number of stories, you'll want to play fast and loose. Sometimes steps will be skipped. Sometimes they'll be repeated. Sometimes you'll go straight to the climax after the opening (this should be rare, however).

Other times, no character arc in chapter 9 will fit what a player wants to do. In that case, it behooves you to work with the player to make an arc that fits. The player's intention is what's important. Players should think of a goal for their character first and then look through the sample arcs, rather than browse the list and feel that those are the only options. When in doubt, find the arc in chapter 9 that most closely fits what the player wants and then massage it in a few places where needed.

One thing to keep in mind: if the arc doesn't involve at least a few steps and at least some time, it's not really a character arc. If a PC gets picked on at work by a jerk NPC and says, "My character arc is to punch that guy in the face," that's not really a character arc. That's just an action. Character arcs require depth, thought, and, most likely, change on the PC's part.

Think of them in terms of the arcs of characters in your favorite novels or movies. When a PC takes on and eventually completes a character arc, that should feel like a novel or a movie's worth of story (or at least the story of one character in the novel or movie). There should be a real feeling of accomplishment and closure at the end of an arc, but at the same time—assuming the narrative is going to continue—a sense that there's more to come. One arc often leads right into the next.

Character arcs aren't meant to be entirely solo affairs. PCs working as a group should help each other with their respective arcs from time to time. The **Help Your Neighbor** arc helps to encourage this. If one or two

PCs use this arc to help another character, suddenly it's a group arc, and cohesion and cooperation will come naturally.

It's worth noting, however, that some players will want one of their character arcs to be a solitary venture. They won't want help. They might not even want the other PCs to know about it. That's okay too, but it might require that you spend some time with them playing outside of regular sessions, even if it's just through text or email.

HANDLING NPCs

Nonplayer characters (NPCs) are people and creatures that live in the world alongside the PCs. They are just as much a part of the world as the PCs and should be portrayed just as realistically. NPCs are the main way to breathe life into the world, tell the stories the world has to tell, and portray the kind of game you want to run. Memorable NPCs can make or break a campaign.

NPCs shouldn't be "cannon fodder" because no one thinks of themselves that way. Real people value their lives. They shouldn't be idiots, easily fooled into doing things or acting in ways that no person ever would, simply because a die roll suggests it (unless they're not very bright or something more powerful—like mind control—is at work).

Think about real people that you know or characters from books, television, and movies. Base your NPCs' personalities on them. Make them as widely varying, as interesting, and as deep as those people.

Remember, too, that there are minor characters and major ones, just like in a book. The person who gives the PCs directions in town are in the spotlight for only a few minutes at most and don't need a lot of development, but a major adversary or ally might get a lot of attention from the players and therefore deserves a lot from you. As with so many things related to being a good GM, consistency and believability are the keys to developing a good NPC.

NPC GAME STATS

NPCs are easy to create. Most can simply be pegged at a level from 1 to 10 and you're done. Working on how to describe or portray them will take longer than working up their game stats.

Sometimes, though, you'll want to elaborate on the NPC's capabilities and tailor them to the concept. A level 4 NPC who is incredibly charming might be level 5 or 6 in interaction tasks. But don't simply make the NPC level 5 or 6 overall because then they'd also be better at combat, healing, climbing, jumping, and everything else, and that doesn't fit your concept.

Use the **NPCs in chapter 20** as good starting points or as examples for what you can do. But you're not limited by them. In fact, you're not limited in any way. The most important thing to remember about NPCs is that they don't follow the same rules as PCs. They don't have descriptors, types, or foci. They don't have tiers or any of the same stats. They don't even roll dice.

NPCs work precisely as you (and the setting and story) need them to. If an NPC is one of the most powerful **handymen** in the area, you can give them obvious advantages with things like being discreet, using weapons, and getting things done, but you can go outside the box as well, maybe allowing them to disarm foes with a swing of their hammer or a flash of their charming smile, make more than one attack per turn, or even have a unique temporary power given to them by the one who hired them.

There are no hard-and-fast rules for creating an NPC who can be matched perfectly against the PCs in combat—it's not that kind of game, and that's not the purpose of NPCs. Instead, use the game's simple mechanics to portray the NPCs in the world and in your narrative so that they make sense and can do what you want them to do (and can't do what you don't want them to do).

Like the player characters, NPCs often carry and use cyphers. Thus, any NPC could have virtually any capability at their disposal as a one-shot power. In theory, NPCs can use cyphers to heal themselves, call on creatures or spirits for aid, push back their attackers, or do anything else. An NPC might also use abilities or carry a powerful artifact. You can lay out these items and abilities when

*Chapter 20: Haints, Spirits,
and Other Revenants, page 344*

Handyman, page 348

Chapter 8: Rules of the Game, page 128

Although an NPC's level and stats are important, just as important are their appearance, the way they talk, and how they act. If an NPC is going to be more than a simple, short-term foe (like a thief), when you make your notes about things like their level and health, also note something about their appearance or personality. If an NPC will interact with the PCs for more than a minute, note at least two different things: they make stupid jokes, they have a scar on their forehead, they laugh too much, they talk very softly, they smell bad, and so on. Of course, you never know who your players will fall in love with, develop a working relationship with, or become the sworn enemy of; be ready for even walk-on NPCs to potentially be around for the long haul.

You can think of GM intrusion for an NPC like this: "This NPC can do whatever horrible thing I want them to do, and to activate that ability, I give their victim 1 XP." The same is true for GM intrusions for creatures.

Snallygaster, page 375

preparing for the game, or you can just go with the idea that certain NPCs can produce amazing and surprising effects and make them up as you go along—with some caveats.

If all NPCs can do whatever they want, whenever they want, that won't instill much belief in the players or give you much credibility as a GM. So keep the following things in mind.

Keep to the Level: NPCs should generally keep to their level parameters. Sure, you can give a tough NPC more health than their level might indicate, and the aforementioned handyman might do some things at higher than their normal level, but these are exceptions.

Explain Things However You Want: If you keep to the level parameters generally, you can express them in all sorts of interesting ways. For example, a level 5 NPC usually inflicts 5 points of damage. That damage might come from a regular weapon, or maybe it comes from waves of darkness created by an artifact, or from a mental attack caused by uttering dangerous words.

Wild Cards: You might give some NPCs—particularly those who have magic at their disposal—a wild card ability that allows them to do interesting things like levitate, use telekinesis, get aid from a spirit, and so forth. You don't have to nail down these powers ahead of time. These rare NPCs can just do weird things. As long as you keep them reasonable most of the time, no one will bat an eye. (If every important foe has a force field, that will seem repetitious, dull, and unfair to the PCs.)

Use GM Intrusions: Since a PC can produce all kinds of interesting, useful, and surprising effects thanks to cyphers, you can occasionally replicate this for an NPC by using GM intrusion to give them precisely the ability needed in the current situation. If the NPC has been poisoned, they pull out a vial of antivenom. If a witch is cornered by the PC, they activate a cypher that lets them disappear and reappear somewhere else. If a foe is at the extreme edge of low health, they use a cypher that restores 15 points of health immediately.

NPCs AND DEATH

As explained in [chapter 8](#), NPCs have a health score rather than three stat Pools. When an NPC reaches 0 health, they are down. Whether that means dead, unconscious, or incapacitated depends on the circumstances as dictated by you and the players. Much of this can be based on logic. If the NPC is cut in half with a magical axe, they're probably dead. If they're mentally assaulted with powerful words, they might become insane instead. If they're hit over the head with a club, well, that's your call.

It depends on the intentions of those who are fighting the NPC, too. PCs who want to knock out a foe rather than kill them can simply state that as their intention and describe their actions differently—using the flat of the blade, so to speak.

INTERACTIONS

Let's say the PCs want to learn more about a missing man, so they talk to his best friend. You and the players roleplay the conversation. The players are friendly and helpful and ask their questions with respect. Do you call for an Intellect roll (using the friend's level to determine the difficulty) to see if he will talk to them, or do you simply decide that he reacts to them well and gives them the information?

As another example, an ancient spirit has watched over the entrance to a binding site for years. She considers it a duty given to her by the Green and has never told anyone the secrets she knows. The PCs come along with some training in interactions, roll dice, and expect the spirit to spill her guts. Does she tell them everything?

The answer to both questions is: it depends. In either situation, you're justified in ignoring the dice and mechanics and simply handling things through table conversation. That's what makes interaction encounters so interesting and so distinctive from, say, combat. You can't put aside the dice and act out the fight between the PCs and a [snallygaster](#), but you can roleplay a conversation. In such cases, you can portray the NPCs precisely as you want, in ways that seem fitting to their personalities, without worrying about die rolls. The best friend probably wants to help the PCs find his missing comrade. The ancient spirit would

never give her secrets to a band of smooth talkers that shows up on her doorstep one day. You can also ensure that the players get the information you want them to get—and don't get the information you don't want them to get.

On the other hand, sometimes using game mechanics is a better option. For example, a person who isn't particularly eloquent might want to play a character who's a smooth talker. You wouldn't require a player who's never shot a gun in real life to prove that they're a perfect shot to injure a foe in-game, so you should not force the player of a charming character to be, well, charming. The game mechanics can simulate those qualities.

And sometimes, you can use both approaches. You can let the conversation with the NPC play out around the table, and then call for rolls—not to determine whether the PCs succeed or fail at the interaction, but to get an idea of the degree of success. For example, if the characters have a good cover story for why the spirits guarding the bridge should let them pass, the roll might determine not whether the haints say yes (you can use logic for that) but whether the haints accompany the PCs across the

bridge. In a way, the die roll shapes an NPC's reaction. It's not an on/off switch but a general degree of the overall trust that the PCs earn.

LANGUAGES

You may have noticed that there are no intricate rules for languages. That's because for most people, language is more of a background or roleplaying feature than a mechanical one. You don't want to have to make a roll every time to speak and be understood, for example. Characters should begin the game knowing the language(s) that make the most sense for them.

Languages are a special case, however, because some people won't want to deal with them. And that's fine. Some players and GMs will find it an interesting challenge to communicate with people or creatures who don't share a common language. Others will think it's an impediment to interaction with no real upside. You can handle the issue however you want.

GMs need to be fluid and flexible as they're running a game. Sometimes a strict mechanical approach is needed, and other times it's fine to just handwave the situation and keep the story moving. The important thing—particularly for newer GMs—isn't always knowing when to do which, but to remember that you have the freedom to experiment.

Because Cypher System games aren't just about combat and gaining power, the NPCs should be motivated by things beyond that. Love, lust, embarrassment, loyalty, revenge, familial ties, altruism, and curiosity are all great motivators.

OPTIONAL RULE: CONNECTION ASSETS

In many ways, this game is one about connections—especially to places, community, family, and friends. You can enhance those connections by using the optional rule of granting PCs assets on tasks for specific connections. The basic idea is that the PC is emotionally invested in the situation through some connection to the place or person, and that gives them additional strength, focus, magic, and so on.

Connection assets aren't given for a specific action, but for a more general situation. For example, if a PC's brother is trapped after a mining accident, you could offer them an asset on a single task in rescuing their brother from danger. The PC can choose which rescue-related task they use their asset on. And the player could use that asset on an attack roll against the company man trying to stop them from helping, on a Might roll to move some rocks,

or on a Speed roll to squeeze into a tight space next to their trapped brother.

Places also offer great opportunities for connection assets. Perhaps this shady spot in the woods is where they first learned they had magic abilities or this home is where they were raised and they have strong emotions tied to it. Sometimes a place is deeply magical in a way that inherently seems to foster a connection with one or more characters.

Connection assets don't always have to be positive, but even negative connections can provide an asset. A PC who's spent years dealing with a broken heart from their ex or who's been in an ongoing battle with a powerful business rival likely still has a strong connection they can benefit from, even if that connection is negative.

Connection actions are typically GM-induced, but players can ask for an asset if they feel the circumstances warrant one.

NPC ALLIES

Because the players usually roll all the dice, NPCs who are not opponents raise unique issues in the Cypher System. If a PC gains an NPC ally who accompanies the group, how are the ally's actions resolved?

Most of the time, the GM should decide what makes the most sense in the context of the situation and the NPC. If the characters climb up a steep slope and must make rolls to ascend, the NPC doesn't make a roll. Instead, the GM quickly considers whether they could climb it and goes from there. A fit, able ally should simply climb the slope. A feeble or clumsy NPC will likely need assistance. In other words, the NPC doesn't face the

Stagger: If the creature strikes a foe, the target must make an immediate Might defense roll or lose its next turn.

challenge (that's what the PCs do)—they remain a part of the unfolding story. The old man the PCs must escort through dangerous mountains needs help climbing because that's part of the story of the adventure. His younger daughter who also travels with the group does not need help because that wouldn't make much sense (unless she's very young or is a person with a disability, in which case she might need assistance).

If the entire group is caught in a mudslide later in that same adventure, the GM can do one of two things in regard to the NPCs. Either decide what happens to them as seems most logical or fitting (perhaps using GM intrusion, since what befalls the NPCs also affects the PCs), or have the players roll on behalf of the NPCs and treat them just like the player characters in every way possible.

CREATURES

Whenever possible, creatures should be handled like other NPCs. They don't follow the same rules as the player characters. If anything, they should have greater latitude in doing things that don't fit the normal mold. A many-mouthed beast should be able to attack multiple foes. A charging mooselike beast ought to be able to move a considerable distance and attack as part of a single action.

Consider creature size very carefully. For those that are quick and hard to hit, hinder attacks against them. Large, strong creatures should be easier to hit, so ease attacks against them. However, you should freely give the **stagger** ability to anything twice as large as a human. This means that if the creature strikes a foe, the target must make an immediate Might defense roll or lose its next turn.

A creature's level is a general indicator of its toughness, combining aspects of power, defense, intelligence, speed, and more into one rating. In theory, a small creature with amazing powers or extremely deadly venom could be high level, and a huge beast that isn't very bright and isn't much of a fighter could be low level. But these examples go against type. Generally, smaller creatures have less health and are less terrifying in combat than larger ones.

The Cypher System has no system for building creatures. There is no rule that says a creature with a certain ability should be a given level, and there is no rule dictating



how many abilities a creature of a given level should have. But keep the spirit of the system in mind. Lower-level creatures are less dangerous. A level 1 creature could be poisonous, but its venom should inflict a few points of damage at most. The venom of a level 6 creature, however, might knock a PC down a step on the damage track or put them into a coma if they fail a Might defense roll. A low-level creature might be able to fly, alter its color and shape so it's impossible to discern from the foliage, or even become incorporeal, because these abilities make it more interesting but not necessarily more dangerous. The value of such abilities depends on the creature that uses them. In other words, an incorporeal songbird is not overly dangerous, but a giant incorporeal bear is terrifying. Basic elements such as health, damage, and offensive or defensive powers (such as poison, paralysis, disintegration, immunity to attacks, and so on) need to be tied directly to level—higher-level creatures get better abilities and more of them.

TEACHING THE RULES

It's not really your job to teach the players the rules, yet it often falls on the GM to do just that. Before beginning a game, encourage the players to read chapter 2 to get an overview of the game. It won't take them long.

You'll probably also want to give them an overview of the setting and the genre expectations that exist. Focus primarily on the kinds of characters a player can create and what they might do in the game. Once players understand who they are and what they'll do, the rest of the setting is just details they can discover as they go along.

The key to teaching someone the game is to start with the idea of die rolls and how they use the same mechanic no matter what a character tries to do. Then explain using Effort, which involves an introduction to the three stats. After that, a player is ready to start making a character. Taking a new player through the character-creation process gets them ready to play. Don't overload them with a lot of details beyond that. All of those can be picked up as needed in the course of play.

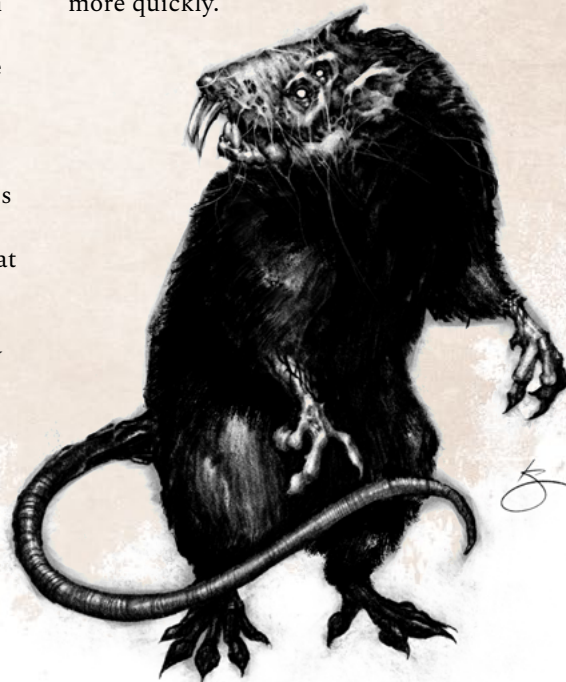
THE FIRST FEW SESSIONS

With any game, GMs should consider running it a little differently the first few times, and the Cypher System is no different. There are a few things you can expect with a table full of new players. First of all, they won't get the terminology and the jargon right—they'll use the terminology and jargon of the last game they played. And that's fine. But you should try to get it right because the players will follow your lead, and after a session or two, they'll start getting it right. If you always call things by the wrong name, the players will, too. However, don't just spout jargon. Each time you use a new term for the first time, such as "damage track," "GM intrusion," or even "difficulty," explain what it means. Make sure everyone's on the same page, even with the basic stuff.

The players won't know what's easy and what's hard. Part of good Cypher System play is knowing when to use Effort and when to conserve, but beginning players will have no frame of reference. In this case, the best way to give them solid ground to stand on is to be fairly transparent. Tell them the target number for each task before they attempt an action. Guide them through the process. Remind them that they can use Effort if need be, although they probably won't forget. On the contrary, beginning players tend to use Effort on every roll. You can almost count on it. This means you can expect beginning characters to do very well in whatever they set out to do, but they'll have to rest more often because they'll deplete their stat Pools more quickly.

When referring to distance, feel free to use the terms "close" and "immediate" interchangeably. Use whatever sounds best in context. The Speaker might be "close" to the Explorer, within "close range," or within "immediate distance."

Encourage the players to describe their actions, not the mechanics involved. The game is more fun if a player says things like "I leap up on the table and swing my axe down on the creature," instead of "I use my jump skill to get up on the table so I can ease my attack roll."



RUNNING CYPHER SYSTEM COMBATS

Cypher System combats should be about something. There should be something interesting at stake. “Trying not to die” is an interesting stake, but it’s not the only one. Combat can be fun and hopefully exciting in its own right, but it’s not necessarily the focus. In other words, fighting through a long combat isn’t the point, and finding a way to win a combat quickly through creative thought isn’t cheating. In fact, it should be encouraged. Defeating the “big boss monster” easily should not be a letdown; it should be the result of smart, creative play. And Cypher System adventures shouldn’t always have a climax involving a “big boss monster,” anyway. The exciting end to the story could involve surviving a massive mining fire, rebuilding a community, or pooling enough money together to buy a car for the group’s next adventure.

The Cypher System is about discovery. Can you have discovery through combat? Sure. Say the PCs are exploring an abandoned mine and stumble upon a stash of powerful items. If the characters go near them, some ghosts of dead miners appear and attack the PCs to protect the items. Although the combat is fairly standard, the PCs have discovered there are ghosts of dead miners down here, as well as a bunch of powerful items that were being hidden and protected for unknown reasons. Who put those items here, and why were the ghosts willing to fight so hard to keep them safe?

In a more standard setup, the combat is the obstacle that the PCs must overcome to reach the discovery, which again reinforces the idea that there is no right or wrong way to overcome the obstacle. Sneak past the foes or convince them to let the PCs pass—both are entirely valid.

Mechanically, combat in the Cypher System doesn’t play out as it does in many games where damage whittles down a character’s hit points or health score. This kind of slow attrition is less likely to happen in the Cypher System because the PCs will try to avoid getting hit. For example, many players will spend points from their Speed Pool to add Effort to their defense rolls to ensure that they don’t get hit (and thus don’t lose points from their

Might Pool). Characters also have numerous abilities to add to their Speed defense rolls or reduce the difficulty of a Speed defense task. Last, and perhaps most significant, the most frequent use of experience points for rerolls will probably be defensive in nature. Many players just don’t like their characters to get hit.

There are two important aspects to this. The first is that it’s the players’ choice. They’re in control of which points they lose and how many, so it feels different, even though the effect is largely the same—a slow loss of points over time. The second aspect is that, narratively, you don’t have to explain and describe lots of minor wounds and scratches that eventually amount to something. In Cypher System combats, when PCs are struck, it’s likely significant. Plus, so many creatures and foes have effects that paralyze, infect, poison, stun, and so on that the damage is not necessarily the interesting or significant part. That’s why there are creatures whose attacks can move a PC down the damage track a step or two. It’s not so much about the points of damage but the consequences of being hit at all.

OPTIONAL RULE: ACTING WHILE UNDER ATTACK

When a character is engaged in melee combat, doing anything other than fighting makes them more vulnerable. This is true for PCs and NPCs. If a character engaged in melee takes an action other than fighting, each of their opponents can make an immediate extra attack. The only exception to this rule is moving. If the character’s only action is to move, they are assumed to be moving slowly and carefully out of the fight, safely withdrawing from combat.

For example, Helen has her back against a locked door while fighting two foes. If she tries to unlock the door, she is taking an action other than fighting, and both foes get to make an attack against her.

CRAFTING STORIES

The Cypher System is all about story—narrative. Which means your biggest job as the GM is to provide the impetus for stories in the game. The stories themselves arise out of gameplay, but they are started and guided by you. You provide the seed of the story and present the events as they unfold because of what the PCs and NPCs do.

Crafting a good story is a topic that could fill a book of this size. Interested GMs could benefit from reading books or articles aimed at fiction writers (many of which are available on the internet) that provide advice on plot. For that matter, similar sources about characterization can help in the creation of NPCs as well.

For now, remember these key concepts:

- Learn what motivates the players at your table. Exploration? Combat? Puzzle-solving? Interacting with NPCs? Cater to these desires.
- Learn what motivates the PCs that the players run. What are the characters' goals? What do they seek? Wealth? Curiosity? Power? Protecting others? Use these things to start your stories.
- Create stories that involve the PCs as directly as possible. If something bad is affecting people, have it affect the PCs or their loved ones, too. Rather than enticing them to strive to save a random farmer, get them to save a character's brother or best friend.
- Remember that the players are your co-storytellers, and that the PCs are the main characters of the story, so their decisions should have direct impact on what happens.
- Weave multiple stories together. Have the PCs learn about the beginning of one story while they're still embroiled in another.
- Vary your stories. Follow a combat-heavy exploration of an ancient mine with an intrigue-filled adventure in a large town that involves a lot of interaction. Create one story that is a long quest but then follow it up with another that wraps up in a single game session.
- Vary the encounters within a story. Even in the middle of a series of battles, there's always room for exploration or interaction (and it breaks things up).
- Not every story needs to be about saving the world. Sometimes the smaller stories about helping one person can be the most interesting.
- Twists and unexpected events are wonderful and should be used often, but sometimes the biggest twist is to have things go exactly the way the players think they will.
- Don't get bogged down justifying, rationalizing, or explaining every detail. The players aren't supposed to understand everything.
- Stories that involve a lot of events the PCs are unaware of will end up making little sense to the players, and should probably be avoided.
- Base your stories on real human emotion. NPC villains can be driven by greed or power, but also by love, longing, curiosity, or even misguided altruism. Don't make your players just interact with the events—make them react to the emotions behind the events. Villains should inspire actual hate and anger. The loss of a valued ally should inspire actual sadness.
- Occasionally, create stories that are sequels to your previous stories. The decisions that the players made in the past affect things in the present. Villains return for another try at reaching their goal, or perhaps just for revenge.

PACING

The key to running a great game as opposed to an adequate one is often the simple matter of pacing. Well, pacing is simple to describe, but it's not so simple to understand or implement. It comes with practice and a sort of developed intuition.

Pacing can mean many things. Let's briefly break them down.

PACING WITHIN AN ENCOUNTER

Keep things moving. Don't let the action get bogged down by indecisive players, arguments about the rules, or irrelevant minutiae. Don't let the middle of an encounter get sidetracked by something that reminds a player (or worse, you) of a gaming story, a movie, or a funny thing on

Bad pacing can ruin more games than probably anything else. Keep things moving. Keep them interesting.



Shuck, page 373

the internet. There's time for all of that later, probably after the game session is over.

Don't let the end of the encounter drag out. When it's clear how things are going to turn out, and people might start to get bored, wrap it up. If the PCs were fighting two dozen *shucks* and only three are left, there's nothing wrong with saying that those last three run away or that the PCs handily dispatch them. Wrap things up and move along.

PACING WITHIN A GAME SESSION

Have many different encounters in a session—some long, some short, some complex, some straightforward. One of the trickiest aspects of game session pacing is deciding what to play out and what to skip.

For example, the PCs want to buy some new gear with the money they were paid for a job. You could describe the market and roleplay each interaction with various merchants. You could even call for occasional rolls to see if the characters get

good deals or not. Alternatively, you could say, "Okay, you can buy whatever you want," and then move on. There are good cases to be made for both approaches, depending on the context. Maybe one of the PCs contracted a disease on the last mission and doesn't realize it until they are interacting with people in the market. Maybe a pickpocket attempts to steal from the PCs, or they notice a thief stealing from a store. Maybe the players like interacting with NPCs and enjoy your portrayal of minor characters. All of these are good reasons to play out a shopping encounter. But if there's no compelling reason, just advance through it.

Sometimes, you should advance the encounter even if one player wants to play out every moment of their character's life and describe everything in excruciating detail. Although you want everyone to be happy, you're in charge of pacing. If you must err, make the players struggle to keep up, rather than letting them be bored and wonder when you're going to get on with it. Thus, if there's no compelling reason against

it, don't hesitate to advance time, even in large chunks. If the PCs finish a big scenario and some downtime makes sense, there's nothing wrong with announcing, "So three weeks later, you hear that . . ." and starting the next storyline (as long as the players are content with it). Books and movies do this kind of thing all the time. *Skip the boring bits.*

In addition, feel free to intrude on player discussions for the purpose of moving things along. Sometimes players spin their wheels or plan and plan their next move, never accomplishing anything. You can intrude by throwing an encounter or a surprise their way ("A message arrives from the person you're working for"), or you can simply say "Let's move things along."

Keep a clock handy so you can see how much time is left in the session. Never lose track of time. You want to end a session at a good point—a place where everyone can catch their breath, at a good cliffhanger, or as everything in a story wraps up so you can start anew next time. These are all fine stopping points, but you want to control which one you use. Next session, you'll have to start things up again, recap past events, and get everyone back into the swing of things.

Try to ensure that at the end of any session, the players can look back on what they did and feel like they accomplished something.

PACING WITHIN A STORY

This aspect of pacing goes back to researching how fiction writers handle story creation, and it's a huge subject, but consider the standard three-act structure as a good starting point. In act one, the problem is introduced. In act two, things get worse (or a new complication is introduced). In act three, things are resolved. There are many other ways to do it, but remember that the action needs to ebb and flow. You need downtime between the moments of action, horror, or high drama.

PACING WITHIN A CAMPAIGN

Mix short scenarios in with longer ones. Weave the plotlines together so that as one story ends, the PCs still have things to do. But don't be afraid of downtime. Let the characters have a week, a month, or longer here or there to live their normal lives before

throwing them once again into the heart of danger. If a campaign takes a year of play time in the real world, you don't want it to take place in only three weeks of game time. That never feels right.

DESCRIPTION

It's a good idea to aim for description that is both precise and concise. Precision comes from avoiding relative terms like "big" or "small" or emotional words like "terrifying" because these words mean different things to different people. This doesn't mean you have to specify the exact height of every structure the PCs find. But rather than describing a building as "a tall structure," consider saying, "a structure at least three times the height of the trees around it."

Being concise is important, too. Go on too long with descriptions, and the players' minds will drift. Sometimes, what works best are short, declarative, evocative descriptions with pauses in between for player comments or questions.

DESCRIBING THE ACTION

Great roleplaying game sessions often involve immersion. Immersion comes from a sense of being truly caught up in the action and the fictional world. Just as when you read a great book or watch a well-made movie, playing an RPG can get you caught up in your own imagination. And best of all, you're sharing your imaginative escape with everyone else at the table. For immersion to work, you have to give great descriptions.

Cypher System combat, for example, is very simple and open-ended rather than precise, giving you lots of room to describe how characters move, how they attack, and how they avoid attacks. A successful Speed defense roll might mean dodging, blocking with a weapon, or ducking behind a pillar. A character who is struck in combat for 3 points of damage might have dodged the weapon attack but fallen backward onto a jagged structure.

The players should describe their actions, too. Encourage them to be creative in what they do and how they perform a task, whether it involves the way they attack, what they do to give themselves the best chance to make a difficult leap over a pit, or how they

slip into someone's house to steal the diary they need.

Don't take any of this as a requirement. Long descriptions can be tedious as easily as they can be interesting. Sometimes the best way to serve the pacing of a combat encounter is to state whether an attack hit and how much damage is dealt and keep things moving. Vivid description is great, but it's not a valid excuse for you or a player to drag things out and destroy the pacing.

DESCRIBING THE WORLD OF ALTERNATE APPALACHIA

Alternate Appalachia is a place of extremes: vast darkness against the brightest light, low-slung hollers against the highest mountains, hands that work in fields and mines against creatures that make magic out of nothing. All set (at least most of the time) in the early 1900s, a time when most of us playing this game weren't even born yet. It's easy to get bogged down in small details of what people wore or said or even to feel uncertain about the bigger things like "How did mines work back then?" and "Were movie theaters a thing?" (They were.)

Part 4 of this book (the setting section) gives you many of those details, and listening to the Old Gods of Appalachia podcast gives you even more, but the truth is that you don't have to get the details exactly right. Most of your players will have only a vague sense of how mines operated back then, or whether people had telephones (a few did), or what it felt like to walk through an Appalachian mining town in the 1920s. What's important is the essence of the setting. The feel of it. If you plunk your players down in a town where every family has a TV (they weren't invented until 1927 and weren't sold to the public until more than ten years later), your players will probably know something's off.

But if you describe a mining operation in a way that gets the language a little wrong (is it a mining tunnel or a mining shaft? Is there a difference?), chances are that your players won't know, and even if they do, it won't take anything away from the story you're building.

The same is true of the magic. There's a deep history, language, and understanding of **magic in Old Gods of Appalachia**, and your players might already know much of it from listening to the podcast. So you don't

want to create something that's actively contradictory (such as stating that the Inner Dark and the Green are the same thing), but you can embellish and build on the understanding of magic in any way you choose, as long as it feels like it fits within the existing parameters and hierarchy (or if there's a good reason why this unique magic that the PCs encounter doesn't fit into those expectations).

Don't bother worrying over description that isn't needed. When possible, stress the most interesting aspect of your description. For example, you don't need to tell the PCs in detail about *all* the homes in a town. Instead, just give an overview of what homes generally look like, and then describe the one that they enter in detail, ideally picking out only the elements that are meaningful, unusual, or otherwise important to the story.

ENHANCING THE HORROR

Old Gods of Appalachia is, first and foremost, a horror setting. And that means that it's important to make the most of its horror elements. How do you do that?

Make Sure There's Something at Stake for the PCs. Give the players time to develop their characters before putting them right into the horror. Let them get attached to the characters, at least a little, so that when those PCs are in jeopardy, the players will be frightened.

When it's time to bring on the horror, don't just have your PCs run off to save a nearby town from a monster. That's a little scary, but without emotional investment, it's only scary on a surface level. Instead, make it so that the monster is attacking the town where the PCs were born and raised, where their friends and family still live. Or make the monster one of the PC's family members under a horrible curse. Or, ideally, both. The more tangled the PCs' lives are in the horror, the scarier it will be.

Use Props to Enhance the Mood. Music, lighting, and the environment can all help create a mood. Candles or lanterns set a much scarier (and more era-appropriate) mood than bright, modern lighting. Having

For additional information on Appalachia, see chapter 10, page 180.

The Magic of Old Gods, page 188

the players listen to a section of the podcast or some of the specially designed **audio files** before or during gameplay can really build up the eeriness of a scene.

Unnerve your players as well as the characters. As you describe a scene in the game, occasionally glance out the window or toward the door, particularly if it's behind one or more players, as though you hear something strange. Make it seem like creepy things are going on, but be subtle. Make the players sense it without being fully aware of it.

Keep Things Unknowable. Old Gods of Appalachia is a specific kind of horror—the horror of the creepy, the alien, the unknown. Fear of the unknown is the greatest, most primal fear. We're much more afraid of the monsters that we don't fully understand. Sure, you could describe a kudzu man as a "15-foot-tall and 10-feet-around humanoid creature made of kudzu vines" and that might help the players see the creature, but it doesn't help them *feel* it. "A humanoid plant looms over you, reaching to grab you with its vinelike arms, while a thick garbled voice whispers sounds that stab into your brain like thorns" isn't a full description, but it's an impression. It gives the players something to picture, even if it's not precisely what you're picturing. It's scary and evocative, and that's important.

Take your time and allow them to hear the horrific creature approach before the encounter begins. Let them see its shadow before they see the rest of it. Let them react to the unknown threat before they can identify it.

WHAT WAKES MODE

The longer PCs move through the world, the more likely they are to come into contact with the many powerful forces of **the Green**, **the Inner Dark**, and **the Others**. And the more they come into contact with those sources, the more likely they are to start garnering their attention. Whether that's a creature beginning to wake from its slumber and turning its eyes toward the PCs, a random encounter with a **Low Thing** setting off a chain of events, or an artifact coming due that causes the PCs to make a bargain, each time there should be a sense that the PCs are becoming more and more enmeshed in something they don't understand.



Aim to use What Wakes Mode to increase the intrusion range once or twice per session.

What Wakes Mode is a rule that allows the GM to escalate the sense of tension, dread, or horror (or possibly all three) each time the characters interact with the powerful forces of the setting. It reminds the PCs that there is something out there, deeply powerful, darkly dangerous, and potentially becoming aware of them.

This is done by increasing the range of numbers that trigger a GM intrusion. When the characters encounter powerful magic, such as an entity of the Inner Dark, the Green, or the Others, increase the range of numbers that trigger a GM intrusion by 1. So the first time there's an encounter, an intrusion is triggered on a 1 or 2 instead of a 1; the second time it happens, a roll of 1 to 3 triggers an intrusion; and so on.

What constitutes an "encounter" or "experience" in this case is very much up to the GM and how the game is playing out, but a good rule of thumb is that any time the PCs are aware that they're in the presence of a powerful entity—whether this is direct, such as a conversation or a fight, or indirect, such as hiding from a group of **Hollow Men**—it's a good time to increase the intrusion range. Additionally, there might be times where the PCs aren't aware of anything, but something is aware of them—in which case, increasing the intrusion range will likely put them on high alert and make them feel a strong sense of dread.

This is a slow-build rule, meaning that most of the time, you don't want to increase the intrusion range multiple times for the same entity in the same session. For example, if the PCs try to hide from some Hollow Men, you likely will increase the range. But if they are discovered and fight the same Hollow Men shortly after, you don't increase the intrusion range again. However, if they successfully hide and then in the next session, a new group of Hollow Men is tasked with hunting down the PCs, you might increase the intrusion range, because

Audio files, page 264

Hollow Men, page 362

The Green, page 188

The Inner Dark, page 188

The Others, page 189

Low Thing, page 188

this likely means that some powerful entity has taken notice.

As the intrusion range changes with each escalation, the GM should announce this to the players. The feeling of rising tension should be dramatic and overt.

Resetting: Whenever the characters are able to rest and recover (usually by taking their ten-hour **recovery roll**), the intrusion range resets.

CAMPAIGN ESCALATION OPTION

To really enhance the sense of long-term repercussions and keep the tension high, use this option. In this case, the intrusion range permanently increases by 1 for each session of the campaign that includes What Wakes Mode.

For example, if What Wakes Mode is activated during the first session, then at the start of the second session, the intrusion range increases by 1 and starts at 1–2. If What Wakes Mode is activated during the second session, then the intrusion range at the start of the third session is 1–3. If the characters don't encounter anything that activates What Wakes Mode during a session, the intrusion range stays the same for the next session.

This option is designed to keep the PCs constantly aware that their interactions with the powers that be have long-term consequences. By the time a campaign has gone on for six sessions, the range might be 1–6, which means a lot of potential for GM intrusions. It's likely that the PCs will want to find a way to decrease this over time, which can be handled narratively, perhaps through a **character arc** such as **Cleanse**, creating or finding an artifact that makes them less noticeable in some way, or making a bargain with a powerful entity (which will, of course, increase the range before decreasing it, by the very nature of this story element).

CONSENT

Horror games allow us to explore some pretty dark topics from the safety of our own game tables. But before you do that, make sure everyone around your table is okay with it. Find out what your players will find “good uncomfortable,” which is something that

makes us squirm in our seats in a great horror movie, and “bad uncomfortable,” which is something that actually makes a player feel nauseated, unsafe, or offended. Being scared can be fun, but being sickened isn't.

Also be aware that some topics, like overt sexuality, rape, and graphic violence are likely to disturb players. It's always best to know for certain and get **consent** from all of your players before allowing these topics into your game.

You need to know where the line is for everyone participating, and you need to know it right from the beginning.

PREPARING FOR THE GAME SESSION

The Cypher System doesn't require you to spend hours carefully designing stats for NPCs (unless you want to). There aren't a lot of rules to memorize. It's not worth writing out elaborate descriptions of each encounter because if you let things proceed organically, many planned encounters might not be used. The rules of the Cypher System allow you to come up with a lot of the details as you go along, since you don't have to reference loads of books and stats during the game session.

To prepare for a session, you need to create only three things: a list of names, a brief outline, and a list of ideas.

1. A list of names

No matter how much you prepare, you'll end up creating some NPCs on the fly, so have a list of names to use when this happens. Leave room to write a quick note next to each name you use in case that NPC shows up in the game again.

2. A brief outline

The outline is an idea of where you think the story could go. Of course, the key word is *think*. You can't know for certain—the actions of the PCs will take things in unexpected directions. In truth, “outline” is probably not the right word. Think in terms of places the PCs might go, people or creatures they might interact with, and events that might occur.

For example, let's say that the PCs are visiting the market in the hopes of stocking up on supplies. You plan to start the

Recovery roll, page 142

For additional suggestions on consent, read the free Consent in Gaming PDF at mymcg.info/consent

Consent and Safety Tools, page 14

Character arc, page 162

session by having them hear about a young woman named Grettie who disappeared mysteriously.

Your notes might say:

- Grettie disappeared from the store where she works yesterday in the middle of the day, which is uncharacteristic of her.
- Grettie has a real way with the customers, so many of them noted her absence.
- Grettie's mom usually comes and visits her daughter at the store. Yesterday, she was home sick. She tells the PCs that her daughter has made some new business acquaintances lately, including one she calls Turzy.
- Store regular: Clarence saw a woman he didn't recognize talking with Grettie behind the store early yesterday morning. He seems unable to describe her clearly, as if she was hiding her appearance in some way.

And so on.

Obviously, that's just the beginning, but you've covered a lot of the contingencies, assuming the PCs investigate Grettie's disappearance at all. Some of that material might not get used. The PCs might not talk to Grettie's mom or the store regular and you'll need someone else to lead them to Turzy. Or maybe the PCs will come up with a wholly unexpected path of investigation.

3. A list of ideas

Just like with the list of names, jot down a bunch of random ideas. These are things you can throw into the game at a moment's notice. They might be flavor, cool visuals, or important side plots. For example, your list might include:

- A luxury car that someone saw driving through town late last night. The PCs have heard stories of this "ghost" car before.
- An old barn that seems to be drawing all kinds of creatures to it.
- A dog that comes running up to the characters, with a note tucked in its collar.
- A large wooden chest that's half buried in the bank of the creek.
- A trail of footprints that leads to a door that won't open.

These are all ideas that you can sprinkle into the game when appropriate. You haven't

tied them to a specific encounter, so you can insert them whenever you want. You might not use them all in the same adventure—they're just ideas.

HANDLING PLAYERS

Part of being a GM is handling players.

This means a lot of things. For example, it's partially your job to make sure that everyone has a good time. You need to ensure that all the players get to do the kinds of things they like to do in games, and that no one is left out. If one player really likes combat and another enjoys NPC interaction, provide some of both. Before you can do that, you need to find out what the players want in the first place, so talk to them and learn their expectations.

Another big part of handling players is coping with disruptive players. Disruptive players can be the death of a game. They can hog all the attention, tell other players what to do, or challenge your rulings at every turn. A lot of GMs are tempted to deal with such players during the game by punishing them or giving them negative feedback.



For example, they have the character get attacked more often, lose experience points, or suffer similar consequences. Resist this temptation. Instead, speak with the player person to person (not GM to player) outside of the game and explain that their behavior is causing problems. Be clear, direct, and firm, but also be friendly.

The bottom line, however, is don't play games with jerks. One disruptive, rude, or offensive player can ruin the whole group's fun.

A different problem player is one who just doesn't get the narrative focus of the game. These kinds of players tend to see all games as competitive enterprises, and they might try to "win" by exploiting what they see as holes in the rules to create and play an unbeatable character. Although part of many people's RPG experience is the fun of playing a powerful character, it shouldn't be the ultimate goal because such a player will get frustrated and bored.

For example, a player might try to use their **Blood Ward** ability, which protects against creatures, and claim that he can damage walls and other objects by running into it with his ward. He'll see this as a hole that he was smart enough to exploit, and he'll hold up the rules and say, "Show me where I'm wrong!"

When a player does that, point him here: "You're wrong."

He's wrong because this isn't a board game where the rules are like a puzzle to be solved or beaten. The rules exist to facilitate the story and portray the world. If there's a "hole" in the rules or a rule that would produce an illogical or unenjoyable result if followed to the letter, change it, redefine it, or just overrule it. It's that easy.

On the other hand, if the player's using his ward like that creatively, to push the narrative forward and not to get ahead, then you always have the right to reward that creativity by saying yes.

Some players absolutely will get it. They'll understand that it's the spirit of the rules, not the letter, that's important. They'll get that the story being told is key. Rather than poring over the description of a power and trying to twist the words to an unintended meaning, they'll use their intelligence and creativity to figure out the best way to use the power to portray a character who fits the setting and is fun to play.

People who try to exploit the rules don't understand the Cypher System, but people who exploit the situations do. If a player is smart and creative enough to turn the tables on their foes in an unexpected way by using what's around them, allow it (if it makes sense). If the PCs find a pool of acid and lure their foes into it rather than fighting them in a straightforward manner, that's not cheating—that's awesome.

Be certain you don't accidentally penalize players for not doing the obvious or straightforward thing. Be generous with people who take nonstandard actions or who do something realistic (such as using their action to take stock of the situation rather than attack—ease their next action). Don't make "attack" always the right choice. It's a creative game, so allow the players to be creative.

DESIGNING ENCOUNTERS

Encounters are to a game session what scenes are to a movie or a book. They're a way to break up the session, and the adventure at large, into smaller, more manageable chunks.

Sometimes it's more difficult to know where one encounter ends and another begins. For that reason, "encounter" is not always a useful or meaningful game term. It's only useful for you when you think about the scenes of your adventure. When the PCs talk to the owner of the local store, that's one encounter. After they do so, hopefully getting the information they need, they head off into the woods, where they have to make their way across a quickly moving creek—another encounter. When a **not deer** appears and attacks, that's another encounter. And so on.

Thus, not everything that happens is an encounter. Heading off into the woods, for example, probably involves gathering supplies, deciding on a route, and so on, but it isn't really an encounter. An encounter is when you, the GM, provide a lot of detail. You and the players interact a lot in an encounter. You might decide to subdivide everyone's actions into rounds to help keep track of who's doing what, when.

Blood Ward, page 37

Although it's partly your responsibility to handle players as the GM, it's not entirely your responsibility. Invite your whole group to help you manage the table; it takes some of the responsibility off of your shoulders and gives the players a role in making sure things go smoothly.

Not deer, page 369

COMPLEX ENCOUNTERS

The best encounters—the really memorable ones, in fact—involve multiple things happening at once. A fight on top of a train that’s going too fast, for example, is an interesting encounter. An encounter where a couple of PCs must work to redo a binding spell while the others fend off those who are trying to oppose the spell is interesting too.

Sometimes an encounter can be intentionally designed with that goal. At least occasionally, you should take an idea you have for an encounter and then add something else that will make it even more interesting, exciting, or challenging. The possibilities are endless. Perhaps a weird fungus gives off spores that alter perception. The encounter takes place while the characters are trapped inside a mine tunnel that’s quickly filling with firedamp. An ex-lover is forcing a conversation while the characters are trying to sneak somewhere. And that’s just for starters. Make things unexpected and fun. Design encounters that are like nothing the players have ever experienced.

Sometimes encounters with multiple levels of action or weird complications arise out of the game itself. The PCs have to leap into a pond to rescue a friend, which is interesting, but the pond’s the home of a **water horse** that was disturbed when the characters jumped in. You didn’t plan for that ahead of time; it just happened because that’s the way things went. And that’s great.

Finally, GM intrusions can bring about these kinds of encounters on the fly. For example, the PCs have to figure out how to control a small fire in a mine before it gets out of control and creates an explosion. With a GM intrusion that occurs to you at the last minute, you say that a pack of **red dogs** is running from the fire and is about to collide with the PCs.

BALANCING ENCOUNTERS

In the Cypher System, there is no concept of a “balanced encounter.” There is no system for matching creatures of a particular level or tasks of a particular difficulty to characters of a particular tier. To some people, that might seem like a bad thing. But the truth is that matching character builds to exacting challenges is not part of this game. It’s about story. So whatever you want to happen next in the story is a fine encounter

as long as it’s fun. You’re not denying the characters XP if you make things too easy or too difficult, because that’s not how XP are earned. If things are too difficult for the PCs, they’ll have to flee, come up with a new strategy, or try something else entirely. The only thing you have to do to maintain “balance” is set difficulty within that encounter accurately and consistently.

In a game like the Cypher System, if everyone’s having fun, the game is balanced. Two things will unbalance the game in this context.

- One or more PCs are far more interesting than the others. Note that it says “more interesting,” not “more powerful.” If my character can do all kinds of cool things but can’t fight underwater as efficiently as yours does, I still might have a whole lot of fun.
- The challenges the PCs face are routinely too easy or too difficult.

The first issue should be handled by the character creation rules. If there’s a problem, it might be that poor choices were made or a player isn’t taking full advantage of their options. If someone really doesn’t enjoy playing their character, allow them to alter the PC or—perhaps better—create a new one.

The second issue is trickier. As previously noted, there is no formula that states that N number of level X NPCs are a good match for tier Y characters. However, when the game has four or five beginning characters, the following guidelines are generally true.

- Level 1 opponents will be nothing but a nuisance, even in sizable numbers (twelve to sixteen).
- Level 2 opponents will not be a challenge unless in numbers of twelve or more.
- Level 3 opponents will be an interesting challenge in numbers of four to eight.
- Level 4 opponents will be an interesting challenge in numbers of two or three.
- A single level 5 opponent might be an interesting challenge.
- A single level 6 opponent will be a serious challenge.
- A single level 7 or 8 opponent will likely win in a fight.
- A single level 9 or 10 opponent will win in a fight without breaking a sweat.

Water horse, page 380

Red dogs, page 372



Water horse, page 380

A railroad adventure is one in which the players have no meaningful choices. It's like riding on a train, which can only follow the tracks, and the tracks go in one direction.

But it's important to remember that it all depends on the situation at hand. If the PCs are already worn down from prior encounters, or if they have the right cyphers, any of the expectations listed above can change. That's why there is no system for balancing encounters. Just keep in mind that beginning characters are pretty hardy and probably have some interesting resources, so you aren't likely to wipe out the group by accident. Character death is unlikely unless the PCs have already been through a number of other encounters and are worn down.

RESOLVING ENCOUNTERS

Don't plan for how an encounter will end. Let the game play determine that. This ensures that players have the proper level of input. You can decide, for example, that if the PCs go into the water, a **water horse** will attack. However, you can't decide how that encounter will end. Maybe the PCs will be victorious. Maybe they won't. Maybe they'll flee, or maybe they'll bargain for their lives.

If you try to decide such things ahead of time, that's called railroading the game, and it puts the players in the role of observers rather than actors. Even if you try to plan out the results of an encounter ahead of time but then let the game play dictate them, you still might end up planning for a lot of outcomes that don't happen. In other words, if you base a whole plotline on the PCs fleeing the water to get away from the creature, but if instead they manage to make friends with it by offering it fresh meat, all your plans are wasted.

Plan for various possible outcomes, but don't predetermine them. Think of your story as having many possible plotlines, not just one.

CHALLENGING CHARACTERS

If the game has a balance problem, it's more likely due to players finding things too easy rather than too hard. If things are too hard, they should run away and find something else to do (or you should lighten up a bit). But if the characters in the group need a greater challenge, try one or more of the following options.

Damage Track: Sometimes a few points of damage aren't enough to scare a player.

But a weapon or effect that immediately moves them one step down the damage track will terrify them. No matter how big a character's stat Pools are, no matter how much Armor they have, there are only three such steps to death.

Ongoing Damage: Poisons that inflict even a small amount of damage (1 or 2 points) every round until an antidote is found can be extremely deadly. Or consider this: one of the reasons that burning tar is so terrible is that it clings to surfaces, including flesh. Imagine a weapon or effect that inflicts 5 points of fire damage every round and persists for eight rounds unless the characters can figure out a way to douse it.

Lasting Damage: For a more realistic simulation of damage, you can use a GM intrusion to indicate that damage suffered by a player character is "lasting." Most of the time, this damage is described as being a concussion, a broken bone, a torn ligament, or severe muscle or tissue damage. This damage does not heal normally, so the points lost cannot be regained by making recovery rolls. Instead, they return at a rate of 1 point per day of complete rest (or 1 point per three days of regular activity). Until the points are restored, the damage has a secondary effect, such as hindering tasks with an injured arm, reducing movement speed by half from an injured leg, hindering Intellect actions from a concussion, and so on. Using lasting damage is particularly appropriate in cases where it would be an obvious consequence, such as when a character falls a long distance. It is also appropriate for characters who are already impaired or debilitated.

Permanent Damage: Similar to lasting damage, permanent damage is a special situation adjudicated by the GM. Permanent damage never heals normally, although extraordinary technologies and magic can potentially repair damage or replace lost body parts. This kind of damage should be used sparingly and only in special situations.

Effects Other Than Damage: Attacks can blind, stun, grapple, paralyze, infect, hobble, or otherwise hinder a character without dealing any points of damage at all.

Damage track, page 141



Effects That Harm Equipment: A PC's gear is often the source of some powerful and interesting abilities. Destroying or nullifying cyphers or artifacts damages them just as surely as breaking their leg would—it limits a player's options, which really hurts.

Enemies Working in Concert: Although a group effectively acting as one is a special ability of some creatures, you could apply it to any creature you like. As a general rule, for every four creatures working together, treat them as one creature with a level equal to the highest of them plus 1, with a minimum of a +2 damage bonus. So a level 4 guard who has three level 3 allies could team up and attack one foe as a level 5 NPC. That means their attack deals more damage and is harder to defend against. It also means less die rolling, so the combat moves along faster.

Beef up the Foes: You're in charge of the NPC stats. If they need more Armor, more health, or higher levels to be a challenge, simply make it so. It's easy and

straightforward to give an NPC a "boost package" of five things:

- +10 health
- +1 to Armor
- 3 additional points of damage
- Attacks and defends as one level higher
- Has an immediately useful cypher

That should do the trick, but if necessary, give the boost package to the same NPC again.

Beef up the Obstacles: Include more exotic materials in doors and other barriers, which increase their level. Make physical challenges more difficult—the surfaces that need to be climbed are slippery, the waters that need to be swum are icy, and other actions are hampered by strong winds. Don't beef up obstacles in this way too often, but remember that circumstances such as weather are your tools for adjusting the difficulty of any action.

Sometimes players are unwilling to spend XP on anything other than character benefits, which in turn lead to advancing to new tiers. The truth is, spending XP on immediate or short-term gains very likely provides as much overall benefit. In other words, in the big picture, four crucial rerolls are probably about the same as acquiring a new skill. It will take some players a while to come to that conclusion, however.

For more on ways to earn XP, see Chapter 8: Rules of the Game, page 128.

Character deaths can be difficult not just on the other characters, but on the players themselves. Check with the table to make sure they're doing okay after traumatic in-game events like character deaths.

HIGHER-TIER CHARACTERS

Although characters start out quite capable, by the time they reach the fifth or sixth tier, they will be truly legendary. Both you and the players might find reaching the upper tiers more rewarding and satisfying if the journey unfolds more gradually, so you can slow down this progress if desired. To do this, starting at third or fourth tier, you can specify how the players can spend the experience points they earn. Requiring that some of their XP (as much as half) must be spent on immediate, short- and medium-term, or long-term advantages—rather than on character advancement—will slow down the progression through the upper tiers. But it won't take anything away from the play experience because spending XP on those advantages is fun and rewarding, too.

CHARACTER DEATH

Challenging characters is important. If there is no threat of failure—or at least the perceived threat of failure—it's hard for players to feel compelled by the story. Very

often, the ultimate failure a PC might face is death. Life in alternate Appalachia is dangerous and sometimes far shorter than it should be. But death is serious because it means the player can no longer play their character.

If a character dies, the easiest and most straightforward response is to have the player create a new character. Ideally, they will make a beginning character (which is the easiest to create), but if the other characters are third tier or higher, it will be more satisfying to let the player create their new character at an advanced tier.

However, keep in mind that a lower-tier PC can operate effectively in the company of higher-tier characters. The differences are not so striking. If a player brings a new beginning PC into a group of advanced characters, be particularly generous with XP to help the new character catch up to the others a bit. Regardless, arrange the circumstances of the story so that you can bring in the new character in a logical fashion and as quickly as possible.



Not Quite Dead: There is an alternative for a player who really, really wants to keep playing the same character. Allow the PC to teeter on the brink of death but survive, saved by their companions, by magic, or by sheer luck. They might recover but have serious injuries that result in an **inability** or some other drawback. Perhaps they need some kind of magical healing, and the only person who can do that wants something in return.

The point is not to penalize the PC (although barely escaping death should have some repercussions) but to change the character in a memorable way.

SWITCHING DESCRIPTORS AND FOCI AFTER CHARACTER CREATION

As the campaign goes along, it's possible that a player might want to switch the descriptor or focus that they chose when creating their character.

It's best if these changes occur organically rather than being forced. In other words, a character's descriptor changes because something happened in the game to change them, or their focus changes because a new opportunity arose in the course of play. (Don't do it if a player wants to change just for the sake of variety or to become more powerful in the current situation. In those cases, they should make a new character instead.)

Changing a descriptor is both easy and appropriate. For example, in the course of play, a **Gracious Protector**'s father is killed by a terrible creature. This story event could easily justify the Protector changing their descriptor from Gracious to something else. If the Protector was fueled by revenge, they might take the **Driven** or **Vengeful** descriptor. If it made it hard for them to trust, they might take the **Skeptical** or **Offish** descriptor. If it made them believe that their whole family is just doomed, they might take the **Cursed** descriptor.

Of course, these characters lose their old descriptor and any benefits it conveyed, but that can be part of the story, too. The Gracious Protector who is now a Driven Protector trains harder, exhausting their body and mind. They might still be gracious, but it's not their defining characteristic anymore.

There's no limitation on the number of times a character can change their descriptor. For example, if the aforementioned Protector achieves their vengeance, maybe they go back to being Gracious—as long as it fits the story.

Switching a focus is a bit trickier, and the story reason is probably more awkward. How does an Explorer who **Manifests the Mountain** become an Explorer who **Cures What Ails Ya**? The change likely involves time to learn something new and a story reason.

Perhaps the Explorer found a mentor and trained to turn one set of abilities into another. Perhaps when their mamaw died, she left the character her journal with all her notes about healing and asked him to continue her work. Almost anything is possible. You just have to work at it a bit to make it a story.

A focus change should occur only when a character attains a new tier, and it probably shouldn't be allowed more than once per character.

Mechanically, the new focus does not overwrite the old focus the way a new descriptor replaces an old descriptor. Instead, the old focus abilities remain, and at the new tier, the character gains an ability from the new focus, but the ability must come from a tier lower than the one just attained. For example, if an Explorer who **Manifests the Mountain** begins to become one who **Cures What Ails Ya** at tier 3, they keep their tier 1 and tier 2 abilities from manifesting the mountain, and for their tier 3 ability, they choose a tier 1 or tier 2 ability from **Cures What Ails Ya** (probably the tier 1 ability, because that makes more sense). When they reach tier 4, they choose from the tier 1, 2, or 3 abilities of **Cures What Ails Ya** (although obviously they can't choose the one they already selected). The character always chooses new abilities from tiers lower than the one they attain in their new focus. This means that the only way to get the sixth-tier ability of a focus is to start with that focus.

A character can't choose abilities from their former focus. Once the change is made, it's made.

The GM can use lasting or permanent damage as a substitute for death. In other words, if a PC reaches 0 in all of their stat Pools, they would normally be dead, but instead you could say that they are knocked unconscious and wake up with some kind of lasting or permanent damage.

*Inability, page 129
Manifests the Mountain, page 105
Cures What Ails Ya, page 92*

As with everything, switching descriptors and foci should be worked out between the player and the GM. The best play experiences come from good communication.

*Gracious, page 70
Protector, page 25*

*Driven, page 68
Vengeful, page 82
Skeptical, page 77
Offish, page 74*

Cursed, page 67

AN EXAMPLE OF PLAY



Sometimes the best way to understand a game is to see it played. This section provides the next best thing: a script depicting a group playing through a couple of Old Gods of Appalachia encounters.

GAME MASTER (GM): It's a dark night, with only the smallest sliver of the moon to give you any light, as you approach the farm where the old man lives. As you get closer, you see a flicker of candlelight, and you realize the old man's sitting on the porch, as if he's been waiting for you.

KATHRYN (playing a second-tier Protector named Carma-Lee): [whispers] "How could he know we were coming? We didn't tell a soul."

MIYA (playing a second-tier Sage named Myrtle): [also whispering] "He's not waiting for us. He's probably just sitting out here having a—"

GM: The old man's voice comes out of the near dark, squeaking like a door that's needed oiling, probably since before you were born. "You're all breathing heavier than McGill's bull when he's in a rut. Couldn't sneak up on an addled dumb-head. And now I suspect it's time for you to go back the way you came." From the direction of the porch, you hear the very distinct sound of a shotgun being cocked.

KATHRYN: At the sound, my instinct is to reach for my own gun, but even as I put my hand on the hilt, I know that's the wrong choice. We can't shoot him. We need him. I need him.

DIEGO (playing a second-tier Speaker named Vester): Seeing Carma-Lee putting her hand on her gun, I hold up my hand in the most friendly way I can think of, although I don't know if he can see me in the dark, and I say, "Oh, no need for that, Mister Whitaker! We're not at all trying to sneak up on you, even though I could see how you might think that, being as it's the middle of the night and all. Just that Miss Cutty down at the store mentioned you were a bit of a night owl these days, and we thought it would be the best time to come and have a word."

I'm trying to persuade him to give us a chance.

MIYA: [whispering to Carma-Lee]: "No way he's gonna fall for that. Vester's a good talker, but he's not that good."

GM: Diego, I'll need a roll to see if you succeed in persuading him. Are you using any abilities or skills?

DIEGO: Well, he seems pretty unhappy to see us, and we really want him to help us and, you know, not shoot us, so I'm going to use *A Smile and a Word*, which gives me free Effort when I use Effort. I'm trained in persuasion, and I'm going to use a level of Effort and that gives me an extra level of Effort, so I'm easing the task by three steps. And I roll a 3. Oof.

The NPC's level is 4, which means normally Diego would have needed a 12 or higher. But because he eased the task by three steps (to a difficulty of 1), he only needed to roll a 3 or higher to succeed.

A Smile and a Word, page 55

GM: Good thing you used that Effort. He hears you out, and then there's a long moment of silence, except of course it's not really silence out here in the woods, in the middle of the night, in the dark. The sounds seem to swarm around you for a long minute, and then he says, "You talked to Miss Cutty about me, did you? Well, I guess you better come on in and tell me what you're here about."

MIYA: "Nice work, Vester. I knew you could do it."

DIEGO: I roll my eyes at her. "Myrtle, someday, you're gonna start trusting my skills."

KATHRYN: "Come on, you two. We can argue about who's got better skills *after* we see if he'll help us." I lead the way toward the house.

GM: As you get closer to the house, you see it's small but well kept. And that's true about Mister Whitaker too, who's holding the front door of the house open, welcoming you inside. His hair and beard are gray, and he walks with a bit of a limp, but he seems pretty sharp in mind and body, especially compared to what you heard Miss Cutty tell about how he's ancient, been around forever. He's still got his shotgun in one hand, but he's holding it in a way that shows he's no longer thinking about using it.

He beckons you to have a seat at a square wooden table. It's got some books on it and an oil lamp turned all the way up.

MIYA: As I sit, I cast a questioning glance at the others about how young he looks. I mean, he looks old, but Miss Cutty made it sound like he was on his deathbed.

GM: You think he notices that glance, but if he does, he doesn't say anything. Instead, he says, "Miss Cutty shouldn't have sent you here, but byones being what they are . . . best tell me what all this is about."

KATHRYN: I know I should say something . . . I've been waiting so long for this moment, but I find I'm at a loss for words. I just know I'll start crying if I talk about it, so I look at Vester, seeing if he'll help.

MIYA: I catch Carma-Lee's gaze and I reach my hand out toward her, in case she wants to take it.

KATHRYN: I definitely do.

DIEGO: I clear my throat a little, wanting to do this justice. "A few weeks ago, Carma-Lee's little sister—her name's Alva, but everyone calls her Nay Bug—"

KATHRYN: "'Cause she's always been afraid of bugs."

DIEGO: "Yeah. So Nay Bug has, or had, this friend who she played with in the yard. I don't think anybody ever knew her name, just that she'd come over in the mornings and stand at the fence and wait until Nay Bug came out. They'd always play at one corner of the yard, building something that only they understood.

A few weeks ago, Nay Bug's friend stopped coming around, and Nay Bug, well, she took ill."

KATHRYN: "She keeps screaming in her sleep, saying she can see us all dying, that it's her fault. Momma's about to lose her mind, and—and we've tried everything. Please, please can you help us?"

GM: Mister Whitaker leans back a little in his chair, looking out the window into the dark. With his face turned sideways, you can see a couple of scars, like scratch marks, at the top of his beard. "I'm sorry about your sister," he says. "But I can't help."

KATHRYN: I think I break down crying when he says that. I've been trying not to, but . . .

MIYA: I'm gonna use *Trace the Threads* on him. If he's used magic or had magic used on him, that gives me training in understanding him. I want to try and find out why he's saying no.

GM: Okay, give me a roll to see if it works.

Trace the Threads, page 37

MIYA: It costs 2 Intellect points. I'm going to use a level of Effort too. I have an Edge of 1 in Intellect, so that will cost me 2 more points from my Pool. I roll a 14!

The NPC is level 4, but the GM knows he defends against Intellect attacks as level 6, so in order to succeed, Miya would have to roll really well—an 18.

GM: Unfortunately, your ability doesn't affect him. In fact, he narrows his eyes at you after you try it and says, "I don't recommend doing that again. Coming into a man's house after he's invited you in and trying to work your magic on him. And not even doing it very well, I might add."

MIYA: Ooh, he's got some powerful protections on him. I'm a little scared of him now. "I'm sorry. I just wanted to try and see why you wouldn't help us."

GM: When he leans across the table to look at you, you see his eyes are so bright green, they're like looking up through leaves on a sunny day. There's something about them that speaks of a whole lot of power wrapped up inside that small body. "Next time, you'd do well to just ask. Nobody likes their mind addled. And I didn't say I *wouldn't* help. I said I *can't*. Long time ago, I made a bond with a creature, to keep me alive, keep me young. Ha. Young." He barks a laugh and shakes his head. "And every morning, break of day, that creature comes slinking into my yard, wanting its due."

MIYA: "What's its due, Mister Whitaker?"

GM: "Don't know, rightly. Whatever's inside me that used to let me work magic, do bindings, lay on hands. That's what it takes. Hell's banjo if it don't make me feel like a damn milk cow. But more important to you all, I suspect, is that it means I can't use up what I got. Either I'm empty or I'm filling up for that creature."

KATHRYN: "What if we helped you kill it, Mister Whitaker? That creature. Or found another way to break your bind to it?"

DIEGO: "Carma-Lee! We can't do that."

MIYA: "Sure we can. We're strong. We've got skills. How bad can this thing be?"

GM: At that, Mr. Whitaker starts to laugh. The sound starts out a lot like his voice did, like a thing unused, a metal tool left to the rain and the rust, but as it goes on, you can see a sense of who he might have been long ago, when he was a young man. Which you're starting to suspect was very long ago indeed. "Maybe . . ." he muses. "Maybe we just might be able to."

KATHRYN: "If we do that, you'll help my sister?"

GM: "Young lady, I've been alive since before your great granddaddy was born, I suspect, and I have never not made due on a promise. So I'm not gonna promise that, because I don't know what's going to happen. There's some chance that beast is the only thing keeping me alive. But you know, I'm willing to find out. Never did plan to be a milk cow in my old age."

Okay, at this point, you've been here a while and you know dawn's not that far away. Is there anything you want to do to prepare?

DIEGO: Yeah, I want to ask all about this creature so we can be ready.

GM: Since you're helping him, and he wants you to succeed, you don't need to make a roll for that. He says the creature looks different every time—you can just tell it by the smell, like rot and spoiled meat.

"When it comes, I go," he says. "Leave my body and my mind like I fall asleep, and when I wake up, it's gone and I'm plumb out of power. But most of my aches are gone too."

He picks up his shotgun with the movement of a man who's spent a lot of time using guns. "Guess we'll see what happens this time, won't we?"

KATHRYN: I've got my **acifidity bag** cypher. I'm gonna put that on, even though it stinks to high heaven, to give me extra Armor and damage. And then I'm going to set myself up somewhere outside so I can see the thing coming before it gets here.

MIYA: I'm going to use **Wrap** to give myself +1 Armor, and get ready to use my **Push** ability if that thing gets too close to us. Unless you're just planning to talk it to death, Vester.

DIEGO: [laughs] "Someday I'll be able to do that, and you'll be sorry you didn't have faith in me. I'm going to take a one-action recovery roll to gain back those points I used earlier."

GM: While you've all been doing that, Mister Whitaker's been doing something with his shotgun, and you can see now that the barrel has writing inscribed on it, and the writing seems to glow a little bit. You think this might be an artifact of some kind.

MIYA: Oh, I want to ask him about that!

GM: Before you can, you catch the scent of rotting meat, right up in the highest place in your nose, like you're practically smelling it inside your head. Mister Whitaker grunts softly, and then says, like he's not that surprised. "Come early. Guess it knows what we're up to. We better take care."

KATHRYN: "Shitfire. I'm not even outside yet. Let's go." I lead the way outside, stopping on the porch to let my eyes adjust to the darkness. What do I see?

GM: It's not as dark as it was when you arrived, but it's not morning yet either. There's that low, great light off a ways that comes just before the sun rises, and off in the corner of the yard, almost right where you all come up, you see a creature. Kind of like a dog, kind of like a horse, kind of like something that's probably been long extinct from this earth. It's got a head lowered as if it's sniffing the ground where you walked, but even in this light you can see it doesn't actually have a nose, or even really a head. It's more like one of those shapes that kids draw when they're trying to draw dogs or horses. In fact, its whole body's a lot like that. Too many legs and none of them bend in the right places or connect where they should. Its mottled skin reminds you of mushrooms after too many days of rain.

Mister Whitaker has followed you out, his glowing shotgun just kind of hanging down at his side. For the first time since you've met him, he seems a little off, a little drained and tired, but you probably don't know enough to tell why.

I need everyone to make initiative rolls to see who acts first.

The creature is level 6, so they need to roll 18 or higher to act before it.

DIEGO: I'm specialized in initiative, so that eases the task by two steps, and I rolled a 13.

KATHRYN: My initiative tasks are eased by my **Danger Sense** ability, and I rolled a 17! It costs me 1 Speed point but totally worth it.

MIYA: I don't have any training in this, so I'm going to use Effort. I rolled a 6.

Because Diego and Kathryn both eased the task, their rolls are good enough to beat the creature's initiative, but Miya's roll is not.

GM: Okay, Vester and Carma-Lee, you both have actions before it acts.

DIEGO: "Carma-Lee, you gonna try and shoot that thing?"

KATHRYN: "You bet I am."

Acifidity bag, page 315

Wrap, page 36

Push, page 35

Danger Sense, page 27

Friendly Advice, page 53
Quick Bind, page 36

DIEGO: Then I'm gonna use my **Friendly Advice** ability and give Carma-Lee training in shooting for one round. I say to her, "Carma-Lee, I know how hard you've worked to save your sister. We're so close. Don't you dare miss now."

KATHRYN: "I won't." I lift my gun, exhale slowly, aim and fire at the creature. I've got training from Vester's advice, and I'm also skilled because of my training with medium ranged weapons. And I'll use a level of Effort, because I really want to hit this thing. So that eases my task by 3.

Weapon Wielder, page 28

If I hit, I'll do 4 points of damage from my gun, plus 1 from my **Weapon Wielder** ability, so 5 total.

I rolled a 17. Ooh, that means I get an additional point of damage, so my total is 6 if I hit.

This creature is level 6, so to hit it, Kathryn has to roll an 18. But she's lowered the difficulty by three steps, so she only needs to roll a 9. However, the creature also has a magical ward on it, which absorbs the first amount of damage it takes, up to 6 points.

GM: You shoot, and you're sure you made an excellent shot, certain that you hit it. And yet, even with all that damage, the creature doesn't react as you'd expect. It doesn't make a noise or even seem to be hurt. There's just a small dark shimmer, like a shadow fluttering, and then it slowly raises that headlike part of itself, and you'd swear if it had eyes, it would be assessing you, maybe even sizing you up as prey.

KATHRYN: "Oh. I don't like that."

MIYA: "I bet it's got some kind of ward on it!"

GM: Now it's the creature's turn, and for a moment, you don't think it's doing anything. It's just standing, staring—or seeming to—and then you hear Mister Whitaker say, "No, I don't want to." And you can see him slowly starting to raise his glowing gun toward Carma-Lee. He's clearly fighting it, though, which gives Myrtle enough time to take an action.

MIYA: "Oh no. Oh no. Um, oh, I know! I'm going to use my **Quick Bind** ability, which will keep him from moving or acting for a minute. It costs me 3 Intellect points, and I'm going to use two levels of Effort.

In this case, Miya isn't rolling against Mister Whitaker's level. She's rolling against the creature's level—6—because it's the one casting the spell.

MIYA: Oh no, I rolled a 1!

DIEGO: Wait, I have an XP. Use it to reroll.

MIYA: Oh, thank you. This time I rolled a 16!

Normally 16 wouldn't be enough, but she eased the task by using Effort, so she succeeds.

GM: Excellent. You manage to wrap Mister Whitaker in your Quick Bind spell. He stops instantly, shotgun raised halfway. But . . .

[the GM slides two XP cards across the table to Kathryn]

. . . you felt like your ability wasn't entirely in your control when you were using it, like it interacted in some way with whatever was affecting Mister Whitaker.

And Kathryn, just as you see Myrtle's ability affect Mister Whitaker, and probably save your life, you hear a voice in your head—a thick, choking voice, like the language of water and weeds. It seems to be promising it can heal your sister. All you have to do is let it in. What do you do?

KATHRYN: First, I'm going to give one of these XP to Myrtle, because even though she saved my life, I know she's going to feel awful about her ability going haywire.

And then I . . .



Chapter 18:

CYPHERS

Cyphers are single-use items that characters gain over the course of play.

Most cyphers are what we'd think of as folk or granny magic—small handcrafted and home-brewed items of magic, often constructed from a mix of household items, natural elements, and specialized objects. They might have the power to heal someone, make or enhance an attack, ease or hinder rolls, or produce even bigger effects, such as calling upon spirits, becoming an animal, and protecting yourself from death.

You might think of them as a way for anyone to perform magic spells, workings, and conjurings. Because the power is contained within them, anyone can use them without any specialized magic knowledge or skills. While most cyphers must be woken or activated in some way, doing this is usually easy and doesn't require a roll. However, using the cypher to affect an unwilling creature does require a roll against the creature's level, just like any other ability.

Cyphers can be gained in any number of ways, including being found, bought, stolen, bartered for, or crafted. In theory, the cyphers gained by the PCs are determined randomly. However, the GM can allow PCs to acquire or find them intentionally as well.

Because cyphers typically contain a powerful amount of magic inside a small space, it's considered bad luck and even dangerous to

carry more than a few at a time. Over time, characters can learn how to safely carry more and more cyphers at the same time.

GAINING AND USING CYPHERS

Cyphers are items designed for frequent discovery and use—PCs can have only a small number of cyphers at once, and after a cypher's used, it no longer functions. Thankfully, cyphers are gained with such regularity that the PCs should feel that they can use them freely. There will always be more, and they'll have different benefits. This means that in gameplay, cyphers are less like gear or treasure and more like character abilities that the players don't choose. This leads to fun game moments where a player can say, "I've got an X that might help in this situation," and X is always different. It might be something that cures a disease, provides a temporary defense, or helps someone find their way home. It could be anything that fits in the setting. Cyphers keep the game fresh and interesting.

IS IT A CYPHER?

While many cyphers first appear to be everyday objects, such as a bit of molasses taffy or a simple brush, they're not. They've been imbued with magic by their creator, by a later user, or by their natural state. You can easily tell a cypher from an everyday object by the way it feels, sounds, or looks. Cyphers might "sing" to a character, or they might have an eerie glow about them.

Although characters are almost always able to tell right away if something is a cypher, they might not know what it is or does. Identifying a cypher is a separate task,



Unlike other magic workings, cyphers don't typically require any knowledge, experience, or abilities to use them. Consider them ready-made spells and magical workings, available to anyone.

Each cypher has a form, such as an apple head doll, but the GM can adjust or change these as desired to fit the story. In truth, every cypher is unique because they're handcrafted, so the given forms are really just ideas to get you started.

Some cyphers require you to say something to activate them. This might be a Bible verse, an old saying, a prayer, part of a poem, or something specific that the cypher's creator has passed along.

*Magic, page 188
Kudzu basket, page 338*

WHY CYPHERS?

Cyphers are (not surprisingly, based on the name) the heart of the Cypher System. This is because characters in this game have some abilities that rarely or never change and can always be counted on—pretty much like in all games— and they have some abilities that are ever-changing and inject a great deal of variability in play. Cyphers are the major reason why no Old Gods of Appalachia game session should ever be dull or feel just like the last session. This week your character can solve the problem by conjuring a helpful entity of the Green, but last time it was because you could create an explosion to close up an entire mine shaft.

The Cypher System, then, is one where PC abilities are fluid, with the GM and the players both having a role in their choice, their assignment, and their use. Although many things separate the game system from others, this aspect makes it unique, because cyphers recognize the importance and value of two things:

1. “Treasure,” because character abilities make the game fun and exciting. In fact, in the early days of roleplaying, treasure (usually in the form of magic items found in dungeons) was really the only customization of characters that existed. One of the drives to go out and have adventures is so you can discover cool new things that help you when you go on even more adventures. This is true in many roleplaying games, but in the Cypher System, it's built right into the game's core.
2. Letting the GM have a hand in determining PC abilities makes the game move more smoothly. Some GMs prefer to roll cyphers randomly, but some do not. For example, giving the PCs a cypher that will allow them to talk to a spirit might be a secret adventure seed placed by a forward-thinking GM. Because the GM has an idea of where the story is going, they can use cyphers to help guide the path. Alternatively, if the GM is open to it, they can give out cyphers that enable the characters to take a more proactive role. Perhaps most important, they can do these things without worrying about the long-term ramifications of the ability. If you're always able to talk to spirits, that might mess up the game long term. But once? That's just fun.

based on Intellect and modified by magic knowledge. The GM sets the difficulty of the task, but it's usually 1 or 2. Thus, even the smallest amount of knowledge means that cypher identification is automatic. The process takes one to ten minutes. If the PCs can't identify a cypher, they can bring it to an expert for identification and perhaps trade, if desired.

CYPHER DANGERS

Each character has a limit on the number of cyphers that they can carry at any given time. This is because cyphers contain powerful **magic**, often from different origins and using different types of power. All of that magic can be dangerous when gathered too close together, if you don't know how to carry it safely.

On a metagame level, the goal with setting cypher limits is to encourage characters (and thus their players) to use cyphers often,

rather than hoarding them. Creating an in-game reason why cyphers can be dangerous and might malfunction when grouped together reminds the players to use and refill their cyphers regularly.

So what actually happens if a character has too many cyphers in their possession? Roll a d6 on the Cypher Interaction table. Roll on the table each day that the cyphers are gathered together.

Cyphers don't have to be used to make room for new ones. It's usually acceptable for the PCs to stash one elsewhere for later use; of course, that doesn't mean it will still be there when they return or that someone won't use it in their absence. There are also items, such as the **kudzu basket** artifact, that allow characters to carry more cyphers without danger.

CYPHER INTERACTION

For each day that a character is carrying too many cyphers, roll a d6 (or choose from the options) to determine the effect of the cypher interaction.

d6 Effect

- 1 The magic corrupts one of the cyphers, causing it to have an effect that's contrary to its original purpose. If the cypher normally heals a character, it now does damage, and if it normally hinders the user, it now eases their task.
- 2 The magic fizzles, causing one of the cyphers to lose its magic and become an ordinary object.
- 3 The magic radiating from two or more of the cyphers reacts poorly. The cyphers are destroyed and a dark magic emanates from them, inflicting damage equal to the level of the more powerful cypher to all characters within immediate range.
- 4 Magic calls to magic: a creature that is level 3 or below begins to stalk the character. Choose one that seems appropriate to the region and situation. If this result occurs on two consecutive days, the creature attacks.
- 5 So much magic pulls heavy on the character. All their tasks are hindered for 24 hours. If this result occurs on two consecutive days, use result 3 instead.
- 6 The cyphers' magic intermingles with the user, reducing all of their stat Pool maximums by 5 until one cypher is used, removed, or destroyed.

The perils of having too many cyphers could be handled entirely through roleplaying, with characters acting out of caution and outright fear of something they know to be dangerous.



CYPHER TABLE

When giving cyphers to characters, the GM can choose from this table or roll d100 for random results.

01	Acifidity bag	38	Elm child	75	Red crown
02	All my enemies	39–40	Falcon's eye	76	Reflection taper
03	Apple head doll (hush now)	41	Farsight	77	Revenge toad
04	Apple head doll (not yours)	42	Fear knot	78	Sachet (devil's deal)
05	Augury	43	Five-pointed star	79	Sachet (love's embrace)
06	Beast shape	44	Gift of the Green	80	Sachet (movewell)
07–08	Black lung	45	Granny's notebook	81	Sachet (offering hand)
09	Blackout creek	46–47	Hag stone	82	Sachet (trick of the trade)
10	Blessed darkness	48	Healing cob	83	Sage jimmy
11	Blessed strings	49	Hooey stick	84	Scent hound
12–13	Blue moon pie	50	Hotfoot powder	85	Shepherd strip
14	Buck's haunt	51	Jag of luck	86	Sigil and thread
15	Bunting crown	52	Known secret	87	Sleep now
16	Canary box	53–54	Kudzu man jelly	88	Snakebite tincture
17	Cats and dogs	55	Labor ease	89	Spirit conjuration
18	Charm of banishing	56	Last match	90	Stay bread
19	Charm of the beast	57	Mad stone	91	Veil lifter
20	Charm of protection	58	Mending mud	92	Weapon oil
21	Charm of retaliation	59	Midsummer bundle	93	Windfall
22	Charm of safekeeping	60	Molasses taffy	94	Winged sight
23	Charm of strength	61	Mud doll (angel)	95–96	Witch bottle
24	Chicken feather brush	62	Mud doll (web of lies)	97	Witch cake
25	Circle of safety	63	New skin	98	Witch petition
26	Come astray	64	Passkey	99	Witch ward
27	Conjure card (little joker)	65	Petrifier	00	Witchball
28–29	Conjure card (moth)	66	Plumb bob		
30	Conjure card (rattlesnake)	67	Poke bag of charm animal		
31	Crow baby	68	Poke bag of good hunting		
32	Danger bone	69	Poke bag of sweetening		
33	Dark splinter	70	Poke bag of understanding		
34	Death's candle	71	Pokeberry bullets		
35	Donkey's cross	72	Poppet (damage)		
36	Door to the known	73	Poppet (sweetness)		
37	Dreamwalk	74	Poxed gift		



A SELECTION OF CYPHERS

ACIFIDITY BAG**Level:** 1d6 + 3**Form:** Flannel bag filled with asafoetida, garlic, sawdust, and salt**Use:** Wear the bag around your neck. For the next day, you gain +1 Armor. Additionally, all foes within immediate range of you take 1 point of damage per round for as long as they stay in range.**ALL MY ENEMIES****Level:** 1d6**Form:** Hex bag containing false daisy, devil's shoestring, ginseng root, and a piece of brown paper with "all my enemies" written on it and crossed out with three Xs**Use:** Say to the bag, "The Devil can't dance when he's kneeling" and then place it somewhere on your person. For the next ten minutes, your attacks inflict +2 points of damage.**APPLE HEAD DOLL (HUSH NOW)****Level:** 1d6 + 2**Form:** Stick doll with a carved, dried apple for a head and an open mouth**Use:** Sew, pin, or glue the doll's mouth shut while saying the name of someone you can see. For the next ten minutes, they'll have trouble communicating and all their interaction tasks will be hindered.**APPLE HEAD DOLL (NOT YOURS)****Level:** 1d6**Form:** Cloth doll with a carved, dried apple for a head and hands**Use:** Sear the hands of the doll. For the next day, all equipment within short range of the doll will be protected. Anyone who touches the equipment without permission suffers damage equal to the cypher level.**AUGURY****Level:** 1d6**Form:** Tiny orb weaver spider inside a thimble**Use:** Release the spider into a corner so that it can build a web. For the next ten minutes, the web catches thoughts, secrets, and information about the general area (up to about a square mile), including any creatures, people, weather, or goings on. At the end of that time, you can read the web, gaining answers to a number of questions equal to the cypher level. The questions must pertain to the area and must be simple enough that the spider can answer them in no more than three words.**BEAST SHAPE****Level:** 1d6**Form:** Blessed bone of a specific wild animal (such as a catamount, bear, raptor, or red wolf) ground into a powder and placed in a tree hollow for one year and one day**Use:** Ingest the powder to transform into the specific animal that the bone is made from (you will likely know ahead of time). You gain that animal's type of movement (swimming for a fish, flying for a bird, and so on) and two assets on tasks to pretend to be that animal. You also gain an asset on one skill appropriate to your animal form (or two skills for cypher level 5 and higher), such as jumping, stealth, climbing, perception, or swimming.

You can still use all of your abilities that don't rely specifically on your normal form. For example, a Protector in wolf form can't use a knife or pistol because wolves don't have hands, but they could still use a healing power or mental ability from their focus.

After about an hour, you return to your normal form.

Asafoetida is a resin derived from a fennel-like plant. Its sulfurous, rotten-egg odor repels evil and disease, and heals various ailments.

There are many kinds of apple head doll cyphers, including those that can heal a mysterious illness and those designed to make someone love you, at least temporarily.

One of the best places to release an augury is in a kitchen, as it's believed that spiders in kitchens bring good luck. Wherever your augury spins a web, though, it's best to leave it alone when you're done asking it questions.

Remember that not all objects of their type are cyphers. Some apple head dolls, conjure cards, poppets, and so on are cyphers, but others might not be. To be cyphers, they must have been imbued with magic by someone or something (or have it inherently).

BLACK LUNG

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Handcrafted ball of grapevines stuffed with dried destroying angel and other poisonous mushrooms, coal dust, and tobacco

Use: Throw the ball a short distance so that it bursts in a poisonous cloud within an immediate area. The cloud lingers for 1d6 rounds unless conditions dictate otherwise. Living creatures that breathe suffer damage equal to the cypher level.

BLACKOUT CREEK

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Small jar of water and sand from a nearby creek that was buried for seven days and seven nights

Use: Pour the water in a circle up to 20 feet (6 m) in diameter to form a temporary self-feeding stream about 3 feet (1 m) across. For the next ten minutes, anyone outside the circular stream sees, hears, or otherwise senses what's inside as a blur.

BLESSED DARKNESS

Level: 1d6

Form: Lump of coal that looks unnatural in both shape and color

Use: Break the lump in half, then place both halves into separate pockets. For the next day, you can see in pitch darkness up to short range (long range if the cypher is level 5 or higher).

BLESSED STRINGS

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Catgut strings made from a three-horned goat

Use: When the strings are played on an instrument, the ensuing song restores a number of points equal to the cypher level to the Intellect Pool of up to four allies in long range who can hear it.

BLUE MOON PIE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Apple filling inside a crusty, half-moon-shaped hand pie baked beneath a blue moon

Use: Eat the pie from the crusty edges inward to regain a number of points equal to the cypher level to your Might Pool.

BUCK'S HAUNT

Level: 1d6

Form: Two pieces of deer antlers taken from the same white buck

Use: Smack the antlers together while calling on the deer's spirit to come to your aid. For the next ten minutes per cypher level, the deer's spirit (a level 2 creature) becomes corporeal and does as you ask as long as it's within long range. It can hinder any or all opponents' tasks, provide information, assist in small tasks, and so on. The spirit will not do anything that goes against its basic nature, such as attacking other non-threatening creatures.

BUNTING CROWN

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Crown woven from red rosehips and the bright blue feathers of indigo buntings

Use: Place the crown upon your head. It creates an illusion over you, making you appear powerful and otherworldly. Others are more likely to follow your suggestions, defer to your wishes, and treat you well. All your social interactions are eased by two steps for one day. Seeing through the illusion is an Intellect task equal to the cypher level.



CANARY BOX

Level: 1d6

Form: Small wooden box filled with the bones and feathers of a canary who died protecting miners

Use: Bury the box and cover it with three large stones while saying words of thanks. For the next day, the canary's spirit tips you off, easing your tasks in sensing danger and initiative (eases by two steps if the cypher is level 5 or higher).

CATS AND DOGS

Level: 1d6

Form: Glass bottle filled with vinegar, seven hairs from an all-black dog, and seven hairs from an all-black cat

Use: Write the names of two creatures you can see on a piece of paper, stick it in the bottle, and shake it up. If those creatures were previously amicable, they are now enemies and begin to attack each other for a number of rounds equal to the cypher level. If they were enemies, they are now friends and begin to help each other for a number of rounds equal to the cypher level.

CHARM OF BANISHING

Level: 1d6

Form: Charm crafted of a carved stick from the "sunny" side of an oak, strung on a red thread

Use: Place the charm around your neck while invoking the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. For the next day, any time you're attacked, the charm releases a burst of magic that pushes your attacker back an immediate distance and hinders them on their next turn.

CHARM OF THE BEAST

Level: 1d6

Form: Deer track preserved in a small piece of dried clay with a hole in it

Use: Tie the charm onto your shoe. You will enchant the next nonhuman natural creature (such as a rabbit, raptor, dog, bear, or deer) you encounter within short range. For the next day, as long as you have the charm, the creature (level 2) will aid you on your actions. It will not do anything that goes against its basic nature, such as self-harm, and can do only what it would normally do as an animal (a bird can fly, but a rabbit can't).

CHARM OF PROTECTION

Level: 1d6

Form: Prepared bone from the right paw of a naturally deceased opossum

Use: Secure the bone into your hem, hat brim, or other bit of fabric where it can't be seen. For one week, the opossum's spirit protects you, giving you +1 to Armor (+2 if the cypher is level 5 or higher) and easing Might defense rolls by two steps. However, healing is more difficult during this time; all recovery rolls suffer a -1 penalty.

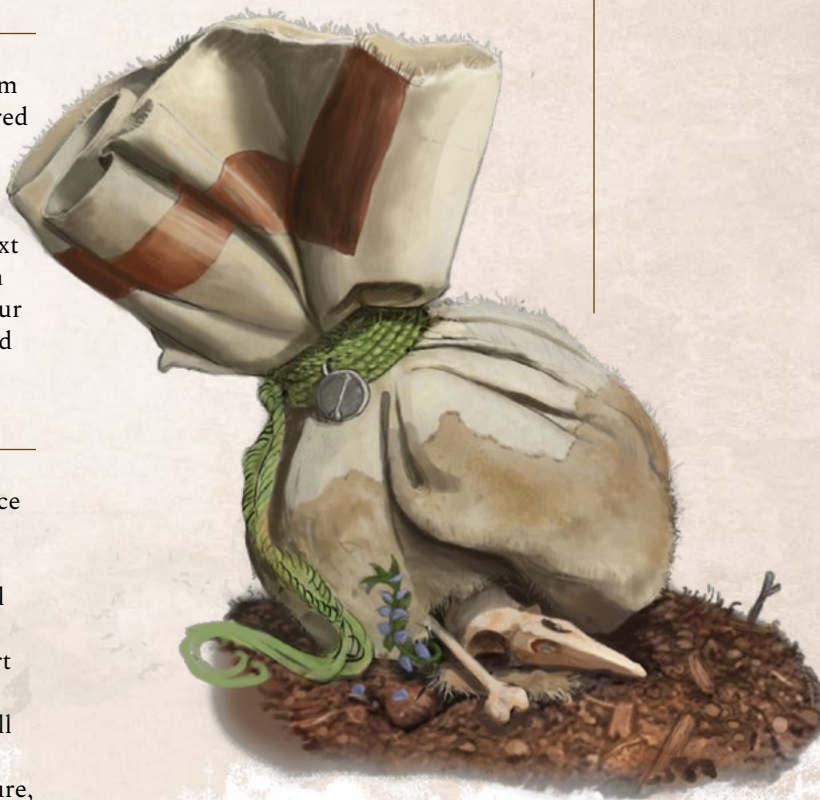
CHARM OF RETALIATION

Level: 1d6

Form: Necklace of strung deer teeth and dried elderberries, dipped in a creek on Easter morning

Use: Place the necklace over your head. For the next day, anyone striking you receives a magical shock that inflicts 1 point of damage (2 points if the cypher level is 4 or higher, 3 points if the cypher level is 6 or higher). You don't need to roll or take an action to inflict this damage.

Canaries were placed in boxes to tell the early miners if the air was safe to breathe. If the canary died, the miners knew to quickly get out of that area of the mines.



Medical abortions weren't legal or even really talked about in this day and age, and they were considered a major sin. Still, those with child knew who to talk to for magical solutions.

The charm of safekeeping doesn't have specific statistics for gameplay. Instead, it's a narrative device designed to drive story and character development.

The term spirits refers to a wide variety of creatures, including witches, revenants, haints, ghosts, and the dead in any form.

CHARM OF SAFEKEEPING

Level: 1d6

Form: Church dirt, baby powder, and dogwood bark bundled inside a bit of fabric

Use: While pregnant, tie the bundle around your waist to protect your unborn baby and prevent miscarriage. Alternatively, bury the charm in a graveyard to induce miscarriage.

CHARM OF STRENGTH

Level: 1d6

Form: Several small pieces of mountain quartz picked from a creek without disturbing the water's flow and placed into a leather bag with dried garlic and preserved bones

Use: Place the bag around your neck so that it touches your skin. Wearing it adds 1 to your Might Edge for the next hour (adds 2 if the cypher level is 5 or higher).

CHICKEN FEATHER BRUSH

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Handmade chicken feather brush with a turned maple handle

Use: Brush the feathers across an object, such as a building, cypher, or weapon, while asking for permission to know it. You learn something important and useful about the object. (You learn two things if the cypher level is 6 or higher.)

CIRCLE OF SAFETY

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Mason jar filled with a mixture of church dirt, ant eggs, seven nails, lye, gunpowder, and saltpeter

Use: Spread the mixture in a circle surrounding an immediate area and light it on fire. The fire burns for one hour, creating a nearly impenetrable barrier. Creatures attempting to cross the fire take damage equal to the cypher level and are forced to flee from the circle for one round. (You must make a roll to see if the cypher affects creatures attempting to cross.)

COME ASTRAY

Level: 1d6

Form: Dried and hollowed-out gourd with a candle or tea light inside

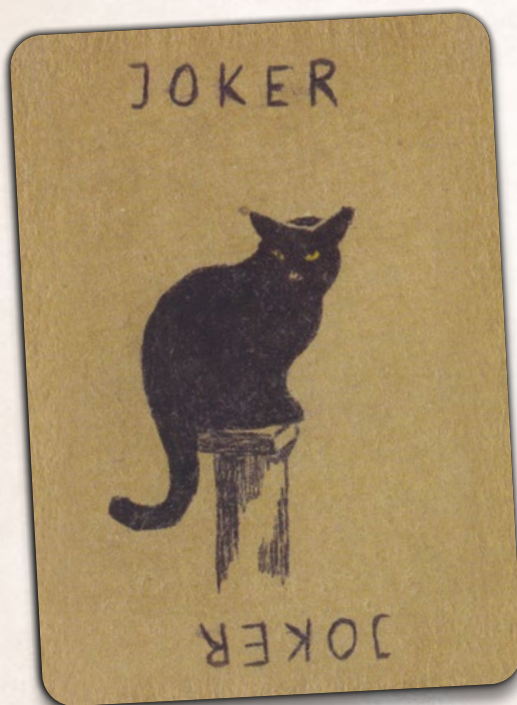
Use: Light the candle and set the gourd on a stump, fence post, large stone, or other flat surface that's off the ground. For the next ten minutes, all spirits within long distance of the lantern will be drawn to it and stay focused on it. All of their interactions other than staring at and moving toward the light are hindered.

CONJURE CARD (LITTLE JOKER)

Level: 1d6

Form: Single card from a conjure card deck, portraying a folkloric black cat

Use: Stroke the cat side of the card along a living creature while calling the creature a name that is not their own. For the next day, any spirits seeking the creature will not be able to find, harm, or interact with them in any way. (You must make a roll to see if the cypher affects the spirits.) The effect is broken if the creature chooses to end it or attempts to attack a spirit.



CONJURE CARD (MOTH)

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Single card from a conjure card deck, portraying a giant cecropia moth

Use: Bend the card with the moth facing out, and then “fly” it to touch yourself and up to five creatures within immediate range. All of you gain +3 to Armor (+5 if the cypher level is 8 or higher) against damage of a specified kind for one hour. Roll a d100 to determine the effect.

d100 Effect

01–12	Fire
13–27	Cold
28–39	Acid
40–52	Psychic
53–65	Electrical
66–84	Magical
85–95	Bashing
96–00	Slashing and piercing

CONJURE CARD (RATTLESNAKE)

Level: 1d6

Form: Single card from a conjure card deck, portraying the rattle of a rattlesnake

Use: Fold the card in half (with the image of the rattle on the inside) and slide it into your pocket or someone else’s pocket. The next time a dangerous creature approaches the person with the card, the card begins to rattle, telegraphing a visual and audible warning and providing the person with an asset on initiative rolls against that creature.

CROW BABY

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Simple doll made out of two crossed sticks, which are then wrapped in burlap and a handkerchief (or other material)

Use: Name the crow baby and keep it on your person. For the next day, the first time you would take damage, the crow baby takes the damage instead, cracking in half.

DANGER BONE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Leg bone from a large animal, such as a deer, goat, or bear, that’s carved with a series of crude holes

Use: When you are in danger or seek assistance, blow into the bone and it will play a tune that your designated allies can hear and understand, no matter how close or far they are from you. No one else can hear the tune.

DARK SPLINTER

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Jagged piece of black hawthorn wood covered with sharp, bristled spines

Use: Attach the wood to a weapon. For the next ten minutes per cypher level, successful attacks with that weapon also blind a seeing foe for one round, hindering their next action.

DEATH’S CANDLE

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Small, black, hand-rolled candle that is half burnt and filled with herbs

Use: Light the candle while saying a prayer of protection. The candle burns for a number of rounds equal to the cypher level. During that time, you are protected from death or being moved down the damage track. While the candle burns, if you would normally die, you do not and instead reject all damage. For example, if you have 5 points left in your last Pool, and a foe inflicts 5 points of damage on you (which would normally reduce all your Pools to 0), you take no damage. However, if a foe inflicts 4 points of damage, which is not enough to kill you, you take the 4 points of damage.

DONKEY’S CROSS

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Charm made of seven hairs plucked from the darkest fur on a donkey’s back, carried inside a small flannel bag on a string

Use: Place the charm around a living creature’s neck. It cures them of any disease equal to the cypher level or lower. If the creature does not have a disease when the charm is placed, it prevents them from contracting a disease for a number of days equal to the cypher level.



Creating conjure cards as props for the players to set on the table when they use them is a great way to remind everyone which cards are active.

In some areas, crow babies are also called hanky dolls.

DOOR TO THE KNOWN

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Writing utensil created from coal dust and holy water

Use: Draw a door on a solid object, such as a wall, large tree, or boulder, while thinking of a place you've been. When you're done, the door will open, allowing you to travel to the place you were thinking of. The door remains for one hour per cypher level and then disappears. While the door exists, anyone or anything that can discern the door can use it. Erasing the drawn line erases the door.

DREAMWALK

Level: 1d6

Form: Poultice made of kudzu root, lichen from the graveyard side of a tree, black mustard seeds, and blueberry leaves

Use: Drench a cloth with the poultice and place it on the forehead, chest, or feet of someone who's sleeping. You can then enter their dreams for one round per cypher level. You can't change anything that happens in a dream, but you can make suggestions to the sleeper. While you dreamwalk, you're unable to perceive anything that's happening in the real world.

In the real world, only one round per cypher level passes, but in the dream world, this might last minutes or hours.

ELM CHILD

Level: 1d6

Form: Chunk, limb, or root of an elm tree that's been given freely by the tree

Use: Write a word (such as "dog," "horse," or "axe") on the piece of wood and ask it to become a living version of that word. The living version is no bigger than a person, and its level is equal to the cypher level. It can make attacks or perform actions as commanded to the best of its abilities and lasts for one hour per cypher level. Commanding it is not an action.

Once activated, an elm child is not an unthinking, docile being. It might, in fact, resist your commands and attempt to take its own actions, but it can't take any actions that would be harmful to you or your allies. You can attempt to stop an unwanted action via persuasion, intimidation, and so on (any such tasks against the elm child are eased by two steps).

FALCON'S EYE

Level: 1d6

Form: Figure of a bird's eye carved from dried beech

Use: To activate the cypher, hold your hand over your left eye while looking through the center of the figure with your right eye. You can then see ten times as far as normal for one hour per cypher level.



Mamaw's house fascinated Deeley. It was full of pretty rocks and dried herbs and flowers and interesting trinkets hung in the windows or over the doors her mama told her were charms.

Mercy couldn't remember what all of them were for, but she satisfied Deeley's curiosity as best she could. The little corn dolly hung above the front door inside the house was for protection, and the horseshoe tacked up in the same spot outside was for good luck.

Hung on the side of the house was a five-pointed star made of twigs and bound together with white yarn, which Mercy said was also for protection.

On a little table by the door was a mason jar filled with coins and a few odd paper bills and painted around with symbols that Mercy explained were sigils in gold paint.

"That's to help keep the family from ever really going broke," Deeley's mama said, suddenly thoughtful and quiet. "Although we were pretty poor, we never really went without. Mama always kept food on the table."

—Build Mama a Coffin, Episode 16: A Mama's Heart

FARSIGHT

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Wreath of kudzu vines, dried flowers and berries, and feathers

Use: Place the wreath on the ground, place your right hand in the middle of the wreath and your left hand over your left eye, and think of a location you've been to. You can see that location as it appears right now, regardless of how far away it is. This vision persists for up to ten minutes per cypher level. You can switch between viewing this location and viewing your current location once per round.

FEAR KNOT

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Knot of hemp rope and animal hair that's been fed a bit of spring water for seven days

Use: Whisper your deepest fear into the knot, asking it to hold your fear tight. For the next 24 hours, you are afraid of nothing. Your Intellect defense tasks are eased by two steps, and you are unaffected by any magic (up to the cypher level) involving fear.

FIVE-POINTED STAR

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Five-pointed star made of twigs and bound together with white yarn

Use: Hang the star on a building, tree, or other object before night falls while saying the names of your allies. For a number of rounds equal to the cypher level, all creatures in long range (other than you and your named allies) have all their tasks hindered. If the creatures are *hexenwolves* or other magical wolflike creatures, their actions are hindered by two steps.

GIFT OF THE GREEN

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Large leaf pressed between the pages of a powerful book for many generations

Use: Rub the leaf between your palm until it crumbles to dust. For a number of hours equal to the cypher level, you gain an asset in all tasks relating to *the Green*.

GRANNY'S NOTEBOOK

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Small book filled with handwritten medicinal remedies

Use: Read the book by firelight. For the next day, all of your healing tasks are eased and you gain a free one-action recovery roll (which you can use at any time). Reading the book takes about ten minutes.

HAG STONE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Circular stone with a hole in the middle

Use: For the next day, the hag stone provides you with one of the following benefits. Roll a d20 or choose from the table.

d20 Effect

1-3	Look through the hole to gain an asset on seeing things that are normally invisible to the eye, including doorways, beings, spirits, magical effects, and so on.
4-6	Wear the stone on your finger as a ring to ward off spirits (grants +1 Armor against attacks from ghosts, haints, and other spirits of the dead).
7-9	Attach it to your clothing to gain +1 Armor against physical damage (+2 if the cypher is level 6 or higher).
10-12	Carry it in your mouth to increase your Intellect Edge by 1 (by 2 if the cypher level is 6 or higher).
13-15	Place it on the finger of another person with good intent to add 1 to the recovery rolls of both you and the wearer.
16-18	Wear it on a string around your neck to gain training in two noncombat skills of your choice (that you are not already trained in).
19-20	Tie it in your hair to ease all of your defense tasks.

HEALING COB

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Doll with a dried corncob body and arms and legs made out of husks

Use: Cradle the doll and say a few words over it. You gain all the benefits of a ten-hour recovery roll as a single action. This does not use up any of your recovery rolls.

Hexenwolves, page 361

The Green, page 188

Hooey sticks have many names, including whammydiddles, voodoo sticks, and gee-haw whimmy doodles.

Kudzu man, page 367

Animal parts including hair, fur, and blood are used in many traditional magic workings. But you can easily replace them with non-animal alternatives, such as beet juice or St. John's wort for blood, nuts for eggs, and maple syrup for honey. Representation and intention matter more than the actual item.

HOOEY STICK

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Mechanical toy made from two sticks of mountain laurel (one of which has notches and a propeller on top)

Use: Hold the notched stick in one hand and run the other stick along the notches to make the propeller spin. The wind you create surrounds and protects you and all other creatures within immediate range. You all gain +3 to Armor (+5 if the cypher is level 8 or higher) against damage of a specified kind for one hour. Roll a d100 to determine the effect.

d100 Effect

01-12 Fire

13-27 Cold

28-39 Acid

40-52 Psychic

53-65 Magic (including curses and bindings)

66-72 Electrical

73-84 Poison

85-95 Bashing

96-00 Slashing and piercing

HOTFOOT POWDER

Level: 1d6

Form: Jar containing a mix of black pepper, salt, spices, and ground-up bugs

Use: Throw it up to a short distance away so that the powder disperses into the air. All living creatures within an immediate area flee in a random direction out of fear for a number of rounds equal to the cypher level.

JAG OF LUCK

Level: 1d6

Form: Piece of cloth with a bit of dried frog blood on it

Use: Place the jag in a left-hand pocket for a bit of luck. The next time you fail a roll, you can choose to reroll without spending XP. You must use the new result, even if it's worse than the original result.

If you don't choose to reroll a failed roll, the cypher remains active and can be used for another failed roll.

KNOWN SECRET

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Cobalt blue bottle filled with wine, cinnamon, a dried peel of onion, and nine sewing needles

Use: Shake the bottle nine times and then ask one question out loud to get a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. Gaining knowledge of the future is level 10, and such knowledge is always open to interpretation. The cypher cannot provide an answer to a question above its level.

KUDZU MAN JELLY

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Sweet and spicy kudzu jelly made from the gifted flowers and berries of a **kudzu man**

Use: Give thanks to the Green while eating the jelly. Doing so restores a number of points equal to the cypher level to one stat Pool. Roll when you get the cypher to see which Pool it affects.

01-50 Might Pool

51-75 Speed Pool

76-00 Intellect Pool

LABOR EASE

Level: 1d6

Form: Bundle of seven black chicken feathers plucked from seven chickens by someone with graying hair

Use: Burn the feathers near someone who is pregnant or giving birth. For the next day, both they and the child are protected against pain and harm. Each time they would take damage, they take half as much (rounded down). If the character is a PC, anything that would move them down the damage track has no effect.

LAST MATCH

Level: 1d6

Form: Miner's matchbox with the final match left unlit

Use: Light the match on the side of the matchbox. Everyone within short range (including you) sees a vision that comforts them. Those who watch the vision in the flame for one round feel rejuvenated and comforted. Anyone who makes a recovery roll in the next ten minutes gains +3 to the roll. After that, anyone who watched the vision but didn't make a recovery roll takes 3 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor).

MAD STONE

Level: 1d6

Form: Smooth, round stony concretion (usually made of hair and fibers) found in the stomach of a white deer

Use: Place it upon a bite, wound, curse, or other injury caused by magic or by a magical creature. The stone cancels out the ongoing effect and restores points equal to the cypher level to a single Pool.

MENDING MUD

Level: 1d6

Form: Small jar filled with stump water, church dirt, coal dust, and moonshine mixed into a thick mud

Use: Spread the mud on a damaged object. The object moves one step up the **object damage track**. The mud can't repair objects that are destroyed.

MIDSUMMER BUNDLE

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Bouquet of feverfew and lemon balm picked with the left hand, usually tied with a bright yellow ribbon

Use: Pass the bundle over someone while reciting a prayer of healing, and it restores points to the Pool that you choose equal to the cypher level. If any of their injuries were caused by a witch, the cypher restores all of their Pools to full.

MOLASSES TAFFY

Level: 1d6

Form: Braided length of molasses taffy shaped into a simple eye

Use: Eat the length of taffy to ease your next action by three steps.

MUD DOLL (ANGEL)

Level: 1d6

Form: Doll made of red clay, sticks, and fabric in the shape of an angel

Use: Wake the doll by reciting a prayer or poem over it, then smash it near a living creature that you wish to heal. The cypher restores their Might Pool to full (or restores them to full health if they're an NPC).

MUD DOLL (WEB OF LIES)

Level: 1d6

Form: Doll made of mud and rags that is filled with beans

Use: Slice the doll open and allow some of the beans to spill from it while saying the name of someone you can see. For the next ten minutes per cypher level, that person is unable to tell a lie, even to themselves.

NEW SKIN

Level: 1d6

Form: Pot of grease made from rendered animal fat, anthill dirt, chamomile, and limestone

Use: Rub the ointment into your face and hands while letting go of your sense of self. The grease changes your appearance in significant ways, making it harder for others to recognize you. Disguise tasks are eased (by two steps if the cypher is level 5 or higher). The change lasts for 24 hours, whether you want it to or not.

PASSKEY

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Regular metal key that was boiled in a special mixture under a waxing moon

Use: Whisper a secret to the key. It will lock or unlock any one door, portal, chest, or other lockable item of the cypher level or lower. For the cypher to work, the targeted item must have a keyhole.

It's believed that mad stones should not be bought or sold, as doing so can negate their powers.

It's considered very bad luck, and in fact downright dangerous, to lose a mud doll, allow it to be stolen, or even put it down around those you're not sure you can trust.

Object damage track, page 146

PETRIFIER

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Piece of fulgurite in the shape of a horseshoe, wrapped with paper and black thread

Use: Say the name of a creature within short range while breaking the fulgurite into two perfect halves. The named creature takes Intellect damage equal to the cypher level and can't take any actions other than to stand in fear for a number of rounds equal to the cypher level.

Harming the creature breaks the spell and allows them to take actions again.

PLUMB BOB

Level: 1d6

Form: Holed bullet or dime, a ring, or a piece of wet wood hung on a string

Use: Designate the person or object you're seeking by whispering a secret that you know about them, touching the plumb bob with an object of theirs, or describing them as fully as you can, then hold the end of the string. For the next ten minutes per cypher level (or until you find what you're seeking), the bob will rise and point in the direction of the person or object, easing all tasks involved in finding them by two steps.

POKE BAG OF CHARM ANIMAL

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Dried magnolia leaf wrapped around crushed berries, garden soil, and ghost owl feather

Use: Tuck the bag into your shoe while saying, "I am a friend to all animals and they to me." For the next ten minutes, all interactions with animals are eased by two steps (by three steps if the cypher is level 6 or higher).

POKE BAG OF GOOD HUNTING

Level: 1d6

Form: Square of cow leather wrapped around tobacco, clay, and apple seeds

Use: Repeat a series of verses over the bag and then tie it around your shoulder (so it rests under your left armpit). For the next day, you are trained in tracking, hunting, fishing for, dressing, and cooking wild creatures such as deer, rabbits, brook trout, and turkey.

POKE BAG OF SWEETENING

Level: 1d6

Form: Square of blue cloth wrapped around lightning-struck wood, salt, sugar, and cinnamon

Use: Slip the bag into your sock or shoe and then say, "Every higher power that should come upon me shall see me in glory." For the next day, all your interactions with people of power, including cops, lawyers, mayors, preachers, and so on are eased (by two steps if the cypher is level 5 or higher).

POKE BAG OF UNDERSTANDING

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Square of rattlesnake skin wrapped around crushed bone, powdered eggshells, and dried scat

Use: Hold the bag in your left hand or tie it to your left wrist. You gain the ability to understand and speak with all living things for ten minutes per cypher level. Of course, they might not want to interact with you.

POKEBERRY BULLETS

Level: 1d6

Form: Three shotgun bullets made from lead and pokeberries

Use: Load the bullets into a gun while saying a prayer against witches. In addition to the regular damage, the bullets inflict +3 poison damage on witches and any creatures who are working with or for witches.

The bullets inflict regular damage and +1 poison damage on normal creatures.

POPPET (DAMAGE)

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Small figure made of cloth, stuffed with hair and bone

Use: Write the name of a creature or object on the poppet to connect it with that creature or object. When you destroy the poppet, it inflicts damage (ignores Armor) equal to the cypher level on the creature or object, no matter how far away it is. Writing the name and destroying the poppet are separate actions.

While pokeberry bullets are traditionally used in a shotgun, it's fine to have them work in whatever guns the characters have on hand.

Lead and pokeberries are considered poisonous, so any character who handles pokeberry bullets and then touches their mouth or eyes takes 1 point of damage (per touch) until they wash their hands.

Ghost owls are also known as barn or screech owls.

POPPET (SWEETNESS)

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Small figure made of wax, adorned with flowers and herbs

Use: Give the poppet to another creature in a short, heartfelt ceremony to protect them from all harmful effects (up to the level of the cypher) the next time they're in danger. If the positive emotion is returned (such as between friends or lovers), you are also protected. For example, the next time someone swings a hatchet, speaks a curse, or tries to poison the creature, the attempt automatically fails; if the creature were to slip near a deep pit, they would not fall into it. Completing the ceremony is an action.

POXED GIFT

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Small box or basket with a simple gift inside, such as a pretty stone or a bauble

Use: Give the cypher to someone who doesn't realize its significance. The next time they attempt an important task when the cypher is in their possession, the task is hindered by three steps.

RED CROWN

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Crown woven from a robin's red feathers and the sticks from an abandoned nest

Use: Position the crown on the very top of your head. You can read the surface thoughts of a creature within short range that you can see, even if it doesn't want you to. Once you've established contact, you can read the creature's thoughts for up to one minute per cypher level.

REFLECTION TAPER

Level: 1d6

Form: Hand-poured candle into which is carved *for my enemies* but backward, so it reads *seimene ym rof*

Use: Light the candle and set it somewhere it's not likely to blow out. For as long as the candle is lit (it lasts ten minutes per cypher level or until blown out by wind or enemies), each time you're attacked, you inflict 2 points of damage back onto your attacker (3 points if the cypher is level 4 or higher, 4 points if the cypher is level 6 or higher).

REVENGE TOAD

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: River stone that appears to be in the shape of a toad

Use: If someone in short range of you has attacked you, threatened you, or otherwise brought harm upon you or someone you love, put the stone on your palm and whisper their name. The stone turns into a toad about 3 feet (1 m) high and attacks the person with a single flick of its tongue. The attack inflicts damage equal to the cypher level and hinders all of their actions for the next round.

SACHET (DEVIL'S DEAL)

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Silk sachet filled with rattlesnake skin, tarragon root, three beans, and crossroads dirt

Use: Awaken the sachet by whispering the name of an individual to whom it will be bound. The next time that person attempts an important task while the cypher is within long range of them, the task is hindered by three steps.

SACHET (LOVE'S EMBRACE)

Level: 1d6

Form: Yellow fabric filled with rose petals, violets, burdock root, and cloves

Use: Feed the sachet a drop of your blood, then name it after someone you love who is dead. In that person's name, the sachet will protect you from harm. For the next ten minutes per cypher level, you gain +1 to Armor.

SACHET (MOVEWELL)

Level: 1d6

Form: Bit of handkerchief folded around licorice root, feverfew, and pine needles

Use: Awaken the sachet by rubbing it briskly between your palms. It restores a number of Speed Pool points equal to the cypher level and increases your Speed Edge by 1 for one hour.

Sachets are small folded packets made of paper or fabric, filled with herbs, and then bound with a red string. Many people name their sachet, but the name must be kept secret.

Sachets (pronounced sa-SHEY) are also called charm bags, tobie, sack of tricks, and little jack.

Psalm 23 appears in the Bible. It's the one that begins with "The Lord is my shepherd." If your character isn't familiar with it, that's okay—perhaps the handwriting is illegible or in an unknown language. Or perhaps it's a poem of protection instead.

Hollow Man, page 362

Red dog is a term for waste coal that was lit on fire and burned out, leaving red ash rock. It's also the name of a creature (page 372).

SACHET (OFFERING HAND)

Level: 1d6

Form: Blue paper sachet filled with tobacco, amethyst, and chamomile

Use: Feed the sachet with drops of water from a river or waterfall to wake it. Then say the name of someone who you wish to have a better relationship with. For the next day, all positive interactions with that person are eased by two steps.

SACHET (TRICK OF THE TRADE)

Level: 1d6

Form: Newspaper sachet filled with seven cat whiskers, limestone, and cardamom

Use: Wake the sachet by warming it between your hands or by a fire and then whisper to it what you wish to become better at. For the next day, you have training in one noncombat skill you chose (in two skills if the cypher is level 5 or higher). The skill can be general (such as mining) or specific (such as operating a particular piece of mining equipment).

SAGE JIMMY

Level: 1d6

Form: Miniature set of skeleton keys made from toad bones and dried sage

Use: Jangle the keys and ask them for assistance. For the next hour, all tasks involving manual dexterity—such as pickpocketing, lockpicking, crafting, playing a musical instrument, and so on—are eased by two steps.

SCENT HOUND

Level: 1d6

Form: Mix of red dog and oil

Use: Spread the mixture around your eyes, nose, and mouth. For five hours per cypher level, you can see in the dark as if it were daylight and have an asset in all perception tasks, including those involving smell and taste.

SHEPHERD STRIP

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Piece of paper with the entirety of Psalm 23 inscribed on it

Use: Clip the paper to your bonnet or hat, or put it in your wallet or pocket. Wearing it like this provides a chance for additional resistance to directly damaging effects of all kinds, such as fire, lightning, and the like, for one day. (It does not provide resistance to bashing, slashing, or piercing attacks.) If the level of the effect is of the cypher level or lower, you gain an additional defense roll to avoid it. On a successful defense roll, treat the attack as if you had succeeded on your regular defense roll. (If the cypher user is an NPC, a PC attacking them with this kind of effect must succeed on two attack rolls to harm them.)

SIGIL AND THREAD

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Small piece of fabric woven with the runes and sigils of binding

Use: Touch the fabric to the skin of a hollow man or other empty vessel, and say a binding spell. If the entity's level is equal to or lower than the cypher's level, they are turned to ash. If the entity's level is higher than the cypher, they are bound and unable to act for a number of rounds equal to the cypher's level. The fabric disappears after the spell is complete.

SLEEP NOW

Level: 1d6

Form: X-shaped amulet formed of two fallen witch hazel twigs fastened together with gold ribbon

Use: Touch the amulet to another creature to put them to sleep. They awaken after ten minutes per cypher level, or if they are attacked or there is a loud noise nearby.



"Empty vessel, hollow bone," came the voice of Marcie Walker from behind him.

"By the words of my mother, and my mother's mother, and by all the strength of my ancestors, I bind you. By earth and by fire, by air and by water, I bind you. By blood and bone, sigil and thread, I bind you."

—Season 2, Episode 25: The Siege of Pleasant Evenings

SNAKEBITE TINCTURE

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Tincture of wormwood, vinegar, and wine

Use: Place under the tongue to render yourself immune to poisons of the cypher level or lower for one hour per cypher level (and to end any such ongoing effects, if any, already in your system).

SPIRIT CONJURATION

Level: 1d6

Form: Hollowed-out walnut shell filled with graveyard dirt, salt, tobacco, and witches' butter fungus

Use: Crack the nut and spread its contents in a crossroads shape on the ground. This summons a level 2 spirit (such as a ghost or haint) that can understand your verbal commands. Once the spirit is summoned, commanding it is not an action.

The spirit can make attacks or perform actions as ordered to the best of its abilities, but it can't speak. It never goes farther than long range from you. It responds if attacked, but otherwise does only as commanded.

The spirit remains for ten minutes per cypher level.

STAY BREAD

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Hunk of bread baked with a handful of dirt from an abandoned railroad

Use: Feed the bread to the creature that you wish to affect. For the next ten minutes per cypher level, they are unable or unwilling to move more than a short distance from where they ate the bread. Additionally, no one can force them to move or spirit them away.

VEIL LIFTER

Level: 1d6

Form: Smoky glass bottle filled with oil, cinnamon, graveyard dirt, and nine open safety pins

Use: Take the lid off the bottle and hide it somewhere that it can't be found. This thins the veil between worlds within long range for ten minutes per cypher level. You can see all items and creatures that normally can't be perceived or seen, and you gain an asset in interacting with them.

WEAPON OIL

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Tincture made of lamp oil, fresh tears, and pine sap

Use: Use a soft cloth to apply the tincture to the "head and feet" (handle and hitting end) of your weapon while saying, "Bless this weapon, bless it well as I anoint its head and feet." For the next ten minutes per cypher level, your weapon is modified in one of the following ways. Roll a d100 for the modification.

d100 Effect

01-10	Eases attack by one step
11-20	Deals bonus electrical damage equal to cypher level
21-30	Deals bonus cold damage equal to cypher level
31-40	Deals bonus poison damage equal to cypher level
41-50	Deals bonus acid damage equal to cypher level
51-60	Deals bonus fire damage equal to cypher level
61-70	Deals bonus sonic damage equal to cypher level
71-80	Deals bonus psychic damage equal to cypher level
81-90	Knockback (on 18-20 on successful attack roll, target knocked back a short distance)
91-95	Holding (on 18-20 on successful attack roll, target can't act on its next turn)
96-97	Eases attack by two steps
98	Banishing (on 18-20 on successful attack roll, target is sent to a random location at least 100 miles [160 km] away)
99	Explodes, inflicting damage equal to cypher level to all within immediate range
00	Heart-seeking (on 18-20 on successful attack roll, target is killed)

The GM can choose the spirit that's summoned by a spirit conjuration cypher. Ideally, it's a person or creature related to the character or the story at hand.

Eating witch cakes is not recommended, as urine is one of the common ingredients.

WINDFALL

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Mason jar filled with a bit of cornmeal and painted with gold sigils

Use: Put all the coins from your pocket, as well as a lock of your hair, into the jar and seal it tight. Within the next day, you will find, win, or otherwise come into an unexpected number of dollars equal to the cypher level.

WINGED SIGHT

Level: 1d6

Form: Bread baked with crushed bones and the hair of someone powerful, pierced by three nails

Use: Feed the bread to a duck, raptor, or other bird of flight. For the next ten minutes per cypher level, it will fly where you ask it to, and you can see through its eyes as if they were your own. You can switch between the bird's view and your view once per round.

WITCH BOTTLE

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Blue glass bottle, vial, or other sealable container filled with a specific combination of nails, bones, red thread, hair or nail clippings, and rosemary

Use: Bury the witch bottle in the ground, secrete it in a building's walls, or display it on a windowsill to activate one of the following effects. Roll a d6 to determine the effect.

d6 Effect

1-2 **Alarm:** For the next day, if any supernatural being comes within long range of the bottle, you become aware of the being's presence. Your initiative rolls are eased by two steps.

3-4 **Recovery:** Everyone in short range immediately gains a free recovery roll. (NPCs instead regain health equal to their level.)

5-6 **Trap:** Captures the first supernatural being (of a level up to the cypher level) that comes within short range of the bottle. Upon entering the bottle, the being takes damage equal to the cypher level and is trapped for ten minutes.

WITCH CAKE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Handheld "cake" with a hole in the middle and spikes around the outside

Use: Burn the cake in a fire while saying someone's name. The burning of the cake cures that person's specific health condition (of the cypher level or lower). It does not prevent the possibility of future occurrences of the same condition. Roll a d20 to determine what it cures.

d20 Effect

1	Addiction to one substance
2	Ague
3	Autoimmune disease
4	Bacterial infection
5	Blisters
6	Cancer
7	Cramps
8	Crick in the neck
9	Fever
10	Hangover
11	Headache
12	Heartburn
13	Hiccups
14	Insomnia
15	Joint problem
16	Psychosis
17	Sore throat
18	Sprain
19	Toothache
20	Viral infection



Witch bottles have a wide variety of uses, and it's possible to have one crafted by an experienced witch or healer for a specific purpose, such as providing protection from a specified person or entity, conjuring a loved one, or offering insight into a situation.

WITCH PETITION

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Piece of small kraft paper torn from a shopping bag, along with an eraserless pencil

Use: Draw a specific witch (or other powerful spirit) on the paper without lifting your pencil, then tear the paper in the spot you're hoping to injure the witch. That witch takes damage equal to the cypher level (ignores Armor) where the drawing received damage. If you see that witch in the future, because of their injury, you'll almost always know it's them, no matter their appearance.

WITCH WARD

Level: 1d6

Form: Chip of wood from an old door or porch railing that was painted haint blue

Use: Break the chip in half and put one half in each pocket or shoe. For the next hour, you gain Armor equal to the cypher level against damage from all malevolent magical creatures, including witches, demons, ghosts, and spirits.

WITCHBALL

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Concoction of wax, bone dust, dirt from a criminal's grave, ashes, and stinging nettle rolled into a ball that fits into the palm of your hand

Use: Wrap two or three of your hairs around the ball, pressing them into the wax, and throw it at a foe (or foes) up to a long distance away. Roll a d100 to determine the effect.

d100 Effect

01-10 Explodes, inflicting fire damage equal to the cypher level to everything in an immediate radius (including ghosts, spirits, and other nonphysical creatures).

11-20 Explodes, inflicting shrapnel damage equal to the cypher level to all creatures and objects in an immediate radius.

21-30 Bursts into a poisonous cloud that causes all living creatures in the immediate area to lose their actions to hallucinations and visions for a number of rounds equal to the cypher level.

31-40 Scrambles the mental processes of all living creatures within short range, causing them to lose all inhibitions, revealing secrets and performing surprising actions. The effect lasts as long as they remain in the area and for 1d6 rounds after, although an Intellect defense roll is allowed each round to act normally (both in the area and after leaving it).

41-50 Drains moisture from everything in an immediate radius. Living creatures take damage equal to the cypher level. Water in the area evaporates.

51-60 Blinds everything within immediate range for one minute (ten minutes if the cypher level is 4 or higher).

61-70 Explodes in an immediate radius, causing vines, roots, and branches to burst out of the ground to restrain creatures in the area. Captured PCs must use a Might-based action to get out, with the difficulty determined by the cypher level. NPCs break free if their level is higher than the cypher level.

71-80 Disarms all entities in an immediate radius and knocks them back a short distance.

81-90 Releases a swarm of birds and insects that inflict damage equal to the cypher level to everything within long range of the ball's landing spot.

91-00 Pulls all living creatures in an immediate radius underground into the nearest large cave, mine, fissure, and so on. Unless you can see or track them somehow, you don't know where they went.

Haint blue is a specific shade of blue that's often painted on porches, doors, and ceilings to drive away evil spirits and wasps. It's also why witch bottles are most commonly blue in color.

Witchballs should be created only on Friday the thirteenth. Be wary of witchballs created on other days, for they're considered to be cursed and might not act as expected.

Chapter 19: ARTIFACTS

Many artifacts are tied to the Inner Dark, the Green, and other unknowable forces and powers.

Artifacts are powerful items that have multiple uses. They're more potent than both equipment and cyphers, and they're also rarer.

While cyphers are almost always handcrafted, artifacts can come from a number of sources, but those sources are always powerful. An artifact might be an ancient knife with a handle of unknown bone that aids in combat, a walking stick of a formidable entity that offers special insight, or a piece of clothing specially crafted to offer additional protection. Some artifacts are seemingly normal objects—a tatting basket, a hatchet, a bible—that have gained their power through their long life of being used, loved, cared for, and passed down through families.

There's often something unknown about an artifact's origin. What impossible creature did this fur or antler come from? Who was the ancient witch that carved these symbols upon this wood? Where was this unknown ore dug up, and how was it crafted into something so mighty? What family passed this item down through the generations to give it this power? Sometimes, at least some of these answers are found when the artifact comes due. Other times, they're unknown forever.

FINDING, IDENTIFYING, AND USING ARTIFACTS

There are many ways that characters can encounter artifacts out in the world. They might find one lost in an ancient mine, washed up in the shoals of a river, or secured in a tree hollow. They might steal one from a powerful entity, business, or family. They might earn one in thanks from others they've helped or take one from a fallen foe. They might barter for one, doing an important task for another.

Artifacts are rarely purchased outright, however. They are typically considered precious and priceless, and there is some belief that buying and selling them reduces their power. (Of course, not everyone believes that, and you can sometimes find artifacts in the hands of the less scrupulous sellers in the region.)

Once the characters find an artifact, identifying it is a separate Intellect task. The GM sets the difficulty of the task, but it's usually equal to the artifact's level. Identifying it takes fifteen minutes to three hours. If the PCs can't identify an artifact, they can bring it to an expert to be identified or, if desired, traded or sold.

Characters can attempt to use an artifact that has not been identified, which is usually an Intellect task equal to the artifact's level + 2. Failure might mean the PCs can't figure out how to use the artifact or they use it incorrectly (GM's discretion). Even if characters use an unidentified artifact correctly the first time, they have no idea what the effect might be.

Before a character can use an artifact for the first time, they must "wake" it, which is an Intellect action. The GM sets the difficulty of waking the artifact, but it is usually equal to the artifact's level. The waking process can involve naming or honoring the artifact (or its creator) in some way, performing a ritual to bind it to the intended user, or removing a negative effect through a cleansing. It's unique to each artifact.

Most of the time, using an artifact is one action. The action is Intellect based unless otherwise specified in the text or suggested by logic (such as using an artifact knife to attack, which can be a Might- or Speed-based action).

PERSONAL ARTIFACTS

Very rarely, a character might fall in with someone (or have a member of their family) who is powerful enough to create an artifact specifically for them. Such artifacts typically can't be used by anyone else, or (at best) they work as if they were two or three levels lower than their actual level.

Just like cyphers, artifacts have a level. Each artifact's statistics include a form, which is a description of what the artifact looks like or is shaped like. The GM is free to come up with a different form for a specific artifact in their story. For example, the GM might decide that instead of an **accursed fiddle**, the characters find a banjo, drum, or harmonica. It has the same powers as the accursed fiddle, but looks and works like an entirely different instrument.

Unlike cyphers, artifacts generally can be used more than once. However, there is a chance that its powers stop working. This is represented in the game by the artifact's come due statistic.

COME DUE

An artifact's come due line is a number and a die type, such as "1 in 1d6" or "1 in 1d20." For most artifacts, you make this roll every time you activate it. If the die shows that number, the artifact still works, but that's its last use. At this point, the character needs to make a choice: whether to let the item's power fade, or to pay a special cost to keep it alive.

The cost might be to complete a difficult task for the creator of the artifact, to give up an important memory to the artifact itself, or to make a pledge to some entity in exchange for the artifact's continued use. In most cases, the character won't know the cost until the artifact comes due, at which point the artifact lets them know.

Typically, the more useful and powerful the artifact, the more complicated or difficult the cost. You can usually tell how powerful an artifact is by its come due roll. Artifacts that come due on a roll of 1 out of 6 (1 in 1d6) are extremely powerful, while those that come due on a roll of 1 out of 100 (1 in 1d100) are much less so.

When an artifact comes due, the characters have about a day to decide if they will pay the cost, and which of them will pay it. The amount of time it takes to pay the cost varies. The artifact doesn't work again until the character has finished paying the cost. If the character who decided to pay the cost dies (or leaves the group), another character must decide within about a day if they want to pay the price. If nobody pays the price, the artifact loses its power.

Some examples of coming due include:

- A manifestation of the artifact's original (or previous) owner appears to reclaim their weapon. The character must defeat them, persuade them, or otherwise find a way to keep the artifact for their own.
- A manifestation of the artifact's creator (or a creature that the artifact is created from) appears and asks the character for a favor, a task, or some type of sacrifice in exchange for repowering the artifact. This might be killing the creator's nemesis, intentionally and permanently sacrificing training in a character's skill (changing from specialized to trained, trained to no modifier, or no modifier to an **inability**), ferrying or finding a dangerous or powerful object, forgetting an important memory, or allowing the artifact to drain some of their soul (represented by the character spending 4 XP to recharge the artifact).
- The artifact itself must be appeased—it requires a sacrifice of some kind from the character to continue working. This might be a permanent decrease in one or more of the character's Pools (perhaps equal to half the artifact's level), gathering the necessary ingredients and performing a ritual to repower the artifact, forgetting an important memory or person, or promising to use the artifact to affect someone or something the artifact chooses. Alternatively, going forward, the artifact will require a small sacrifice each time the character uses it—perhaps it inflicts 1 point of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) each time.
- The item is hungry for the character's blood, and they agree to feed it at some unspecified point in the future in exchange for continuing to function right

Accursed fiddle, page 333

Inability, page 129

Another way to think of the come due line is an estimate of how many uses you'll get out of the artifact. On average, you'll get a number of uses equal to about half of the listed die type: 3 or 4 for a "1 in 1d6" artifact, 10 or 11 for a "1 in 1d20" artifact, and so on.

Damage track, page 141

Because it's the nature of the Inner Dark to corrupt other things, sacrificing an Inner Dark artifact or cypher to pay the come due cost likely results in the item developing a flaw, side effect, or malevolent connection to evil.

An artifact that automatically comes due is much like a one-use cypher, except it doesn't count toward a character's cypher limit.

Typically, a character must decide within a day or so if they will pay the cost of an artifact that's come due. If they choose not to pay, they aren't likely to get the opportunity again.

now. At any time, the GM can intrude on an encounter (as if the character had rolled a natural 1 on a d20) and immediately move the character two steps down the **damage track**, at which time the artifact is sated and continues to work. (This sort of payment is handy for GMs in a rush to come up with something interesting and for players who need to keep using the artifact right away.)

- The item needs to draw power from one or more magical objects. The character must perform a one-hour ritual with the artifact that involves destroying another artifact or three cyphers. All of the destroyed items must have a level equal to or higher than the one that has come due.
- The item is sick or injured in some way. It must be taken to a healer of some kind to work again. This likely requires the user to find an appropriate healer, gather necessary materials for them, and pay some kind of price.
- The item's magic is depleted (or the item is broken) and can't be fully restored. However, it's possible that a powerful crafter could use parts of the depleted item to craft a new one—for a cost, of course.

A come due entry of “—” means that the artifact never comes due. An entry of “automatic” means the artifact comes due after one use (this is uncommon, and is mainly for one-use weapon artifacts like magically blessed bullets).

Many artifacts can still be used as their mundane version if the character doesn't pay the cost when an artifact comes due (or if they're working on paying it). For example, if an artifact hatchet comes due, the character can still use it as a regular hatchet. Same with a piece of clothing, basket, or lantern.



An artifact coming due should always have an emotional or story consequence for the character. Ideally, that consequence is meaningful and impactful, requiring the character to give up something they care about to keep their powerful object. The goal is for the character to make a difficult choice, but not an impossible one.

ARTIFACT TABLE

When giving an artifact to a character, either choose from this table or roll a d100 for a random artifact.

d100 Artifact

01-02	Accursed fiddle
03-04	Beechwood tabaret
05	Ben's dinner pail
06-09	Blessed bullet
10-11	The Blue Ghost
12-13	Bone ring
14-15	Bone scythe
16-17	Broken radio
18-19	Clement's carver
20-22	Colliery whistle
23-26	Conjure deck
27-29	Daddy's hunting knife
30-31	Devil's lash
32-33	Dulcimer of the red dogs
34-36	Eyeless crown
37-39	Firedamp
40	Flesh of my flesh
41	God's tool
42-43	Great tooth
44-45	Hen basket
46-47	Houndskin knapsack
48-49	Invisibility amulet
50-51	Jeweled comb
52-53	Keeper
54-55	Kudzu basket
56-58	Mamaw's quilt
59-60	Mask of stolen breath
61-63	Memory jar
64	Miss Ida's mirror
65-67	Moon shard
68	Moonbone
69-70	My diary
71-72	Pick of the wicked
73-74	Prayer of protection against wolves
75-76	Root mask
77-80	Sator square (lookout)
81-84	Sator square (protection)
85-87	Scrying eye
88-89	Shadow helmet
90-92	Sweet sleep
93-95	Tatting basket
96	Time keeper
97-98	Unknown caller
99	The Unmaker
00	With love

A SELECTION OF ARTIFACTS

ACCURSED FIDDLE

Level: 1d6

Form: Cursed fiddle, hand-carved from dogwood

Use: When you play an upbeat song on the fiddle for about ten minutes, it causes all allies to dance or otherwise respond to the music, healing them for a number of points equal to the artifact level.

When you do nothing but play a dirge for two rounds, on the second round, the song causes every hearing living being you designate in short range to become despondent, inflicting Intellect damage equal to the artifact level.

Each time you activate the magic of the fiddle, you take 2 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor).

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (roll after each song)

BEECHWOOD TABARET

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Long wooden staff with a 6-inch (15 cm) hoop attached to the tip

Use: When you lift the hoop into the air, images flicker to life inside it, warning you of danger. The images are representative of the danger but don't show details.

For example, approaching enemies look like threatening, amorphous creatures, and dangerous weather might look like lightning bolts coming from a cloud. If the artifact level is 8 or higher, the warnings come earlier and the images more accurately represent the threat.

The GM decides when and how the staff warns of danger. For inexplicable reasons, sometimes it fails to deliver a warning. (Thus, it's all right if the GM forgets about the staff occasionally.)

Come Due: 1 in 1d100

BEN'S DINNER PAIL

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Oval metal dinner pail of a coal miner, with a wooden handle and a photo of a young miner placed inside

Use: Anything you place inside the container does not experience time's passage for a number of weeks equal to the artifact level. Food doesn't rot, creatures don't age, and so on.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each time you add something to the pail or remove it).

If the photo is lost or stolen, the artifact automatically comes due.

BLESSED BULLET

Level: 1d6

Form: Bullet marked with a blessing (such as a cross or symbol of the Green) or anointed with special herbs and oils

Use: You fire this from a pistol or rifle, just like you would a regular bullet. It inflicts an additional 2 points of damage (or 4 points for artifact level 5 or higher). If you hit with the bullet and also succeed at an Intellect-based attack against the target creature, their actions are hindered for one round.

Come Due: Automatic

THE BLUE GHOST

Level: 1d6

Form: Blue oil lantern, rusted and worn, with the initials EKR carved into its base

Use: Lighting the lantern causes it not to give off light, but to emit deep, thick shadows. For the next hour, these shadows provide an asset to hiding, sneaking, and remaining undetected to you and all your allies within short range. The effect ends if someone inside the shadows interacts with another creature by entering into combat, speaking with someone, and so on.

Come Due: 1 in 1d10

Blessed bullets are often made by hammering or melting down a silver coin into a slug that fits a barrel. Sometimes the slug still has faint remnants of the image or words from the coin.

Depending on who makes them, blessed bullets might be called "witching bullets" or "hex bullets."



Haint tree, page 360

Axinomancy is a method of divination done by throwing an axe or hatchet into the ground and interpreting the direction of the handle or the quivering of the blade. Agates are believed to assist in divination.

BONE RING

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Ring carved from the bone of a powerful beast

Use: When worn on your finger, the ring gives you the ability to perceive the imperceptible. All tasks involved in perception, searching, and understanding motives are eased.

If you spend an action turning the ring on your finger, you can attempt to read the surface thoughts of someone within close range, even if they don't want you to, for about ten minutes. You must succeed on an Intellect-based attack against a creature to read their mind.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each day worn, or for each attempt to read a mind)

BONE SCYTHE

Level: 1d6

Form: Eight-foot (2.5 m) long scythe assembled from the bones of a haint tree's victims

Use: You can ride through the air on the bone scythe. It moves a short distance each round; overland, it flies at about 15 miles (24 km) per hour. You can (mostly) control the direction of the movement by politely asking the bone scythe to turn this way or that (a difficulty 1 persuasion roll each time). Failing the roll means the scythe either continues straight or comes to a stop for a few rounds or a few minutes, depending on its speed.

Come Due: 1–2 in 1d100 (check each activation but no more than once per day)



[Ellie's] momma called the knife Moonbone, 'cause she said that was the name it told her. Ellie called it Welling Wound, 'cause that's what her daddy had called it in the letter he left with it. The knife was as much a part of Ellie and her own gift, and she could use it for a variety of purposes. Like the one she brought it here for tonight.

—A Once-Told Tale:
The Wolf Sisters Part Two

BROKEN RADIO

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Battered and dingy battery radio that is impossible to repair or clean

Use: Although the radio doesn't work as a radio should, turning the dials causes it to connect to something else, a hidden layer in the world that is otherwise unknown. Once per day, often when you least expect it, the radio broadcasts something interesting—a bit of news that's relevant to your current situation, a song that provides insight, or perhaps a helpful message from someone or something.

Come Due: —

CLEMENT'S CARVER

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Iron hatchet with a worn-smooth handle of hickory wood threaded with agate

Use: When you strike a creature of the artifact level or lower with the hatchet, you can choose to make a second attack as part of the same action. If the second attack is a success, the creature is killed. (If the creature is a PC, the character instead moves one step down the damage track.)

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check at the end of each combat encounter)

COLLIERY WHISTLE

Level: 1d6

Form: Brass steam whistle (scorched and dented) once used to signal mining fires and accidents

Use: Pulling the lever activates the whistle. It emits a cone of sound that affects all hearing creatures you designate in long range, knocking them prone and stunning them for one round. Unfixed items the size of a dog or smaller are toppled and/or moved at least 5 feet (1.5 m). Larger objects might also be toppled.

Come Due: 1 in 1d10

CONJURE DECK

Level: 1d6

Form: Deck of handmade tarot cards, with each card drawn by a different artist

Use: This deck functions as a normal tarot deck. However, once per day, you can shuffle the deck and draw a card for yourself, gaining a special benefit for the next day. The GM randomly determines which type of card you draw by rolling a d6 on the following table.

d6 Effect

1-2	<i>Creature.</i> You take on the aspects of a creature of your choice. You gain an asset in two noncombat tasks relevant to the creature. For example, if you choose a catamount, you could gain assets in stalking and running.
3-4	<i>Tool.</i> You become mighty. You gain +1 to your Might Edge and ease all noncombat Might tasks, including smashing, breaking, and carrying.
5	<i>Joker.</i> You become a delight. You gain +1 to your Intellect Edge and ease all positive social interactions.
6	<i>Death.</i> You become death's weapon. All of your attacks are eased.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each time you draw a card to gain a magical effect)

DADDY'S HUNTING KNIFE

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Knife whose handle tip is carved to look like a raptor's claw, and its blade is etched with a tricolor image of mountains

Use: You can use the blade to cut through up to 5 feet (1.5 m) of any material equal to or lower than the artifact level. If used as a weapon, the knife deals damage equal to the artifact level.

Come Due: 1 in 1d6 (check after each use or combat encounter)

DEVIL'S LASH

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Whip of thin cord, inscribed metal points, and thorns of devil's crown, supposedly once wielded by the devil himself

Use: This whip is a light weapon that inflicts 2 points of damage. Against magical creatures such as witches, spirits, ghosts, and so on, it inflicts an additional 2 points of damage (or 4 points for artifact level 6 and higher), even if the entity is insubstantial.

If the artifact is level 6 or higher, it also gives an asset on the attack roll.

Come Due: 1 in 1d6 (check at the end of each combat encounter)

DULCIMER OF THE RED DOGS

Level: 1d6

Form: Hourglass-shaped mountain dulcimer

Use: You can play this musical instrument normally, but it also has a setting that produces no obviously audible noise. If played this way in a mine or within long range of a mine, a pack of **red dogs** arrives within a few minutes (typically a number of dogs equal to the artifact level + 4). The red dogs are not under any obligation to help you, but you can attempt to befriend or intimidate them into helping you. They stick around for about ten minutes before leaving.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20

Most Appalachian craft or handiwork items have a single error or imperfection. These are purposeful and considered a signature of the artist.

Red dogs, page 372



There are many stories of the man known as Cread Beck. One says that he climbed a mountain, and at the top he found an old god, with whom he made a fool's bargain—for the return of his dead child, he would become that god's vengeful tool. But that's just one story.

Bartholomew, page 384

EYELESS CROWN

Level: 1d6

Form: Bone circlet set with several shards of smoky quartz

Use: Cover your eyes with your hands while wearing the circlet on your head. You can get a sense of something that happened in the place where you're standing on a day that you choose, up to a year in the past. The crown doesn't give you a clear vision of what happened so much as a series of sensory details, much like a dream. You might smell, hear, taste, or see things from that event in the past.

Depending on the event you want to see, the details might cover moments, minutes, or hours. For example, you would experience the important parts of a short conversation, highlights of a wedding or party that lasted a couple of hours, or a summary of a ten-hour railroad trip.

You can't interact with anything or anyone in the vision, nor can you take any other actions without breaking the vision. You can attempt to experience the same day again (whether or not it's the same event), but each time after the first inflicts Intellect damage (ignores Armor) equal to the artifact level.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20

FIREDAMP

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Metal box about 3 feet (1 m) per side, filled with methane gas, with various charms and trinkets glued to it

Use: Anything of the artifact level or lower that is placed in the box is instantly and permanently destroyed. Each time the box is opened, anyone within short range of the box takes 1 point of Might damage (ignores Armor).

Come Due: 1 in 1d20

FLESH OF MY FLESH

Level: 1d6

Form: Soft, stretchy suit that appears to be crafted from the skin of a hairless creature, large enough to cover a grown human from neck to ankles

Use: When worn beneath your clothing, the suit tightens to fit your physical form. It provides Armor equal to half its level (round up) but doesn't hinder your movement or tire you in any way. On the contrary, you feel powerful—your maximum Might Pool is permanently increased by 2.

However, wearing this skin takes its toll.

The first time you put on the skin, your Intellect Pool is permanently reduced by 2 points, and these points can't be regained. Putting on or removing the suit is an action.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each day)

GOD'S TOOL

Level: 1d6 + 4

Form: Ancient walking stick handcrafted from lightning-struck elm wood with the name *Cread Beck* inscribed on its side

Use: Touching the stick to a creature (a Might- or Speed-based attack) delivers a powerful burst of lightning, inflicting damage equal to the artifact level. You also take 1 point of damage from this electricity each time it's used to make an attack.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check at the end of each combat encounter)

GREAT TOOTH

Level: 1d6

Form: Large tooth given freely (from *Bartholomew* or another bear of the Green), with healing runes carved upon it

Use: When you wear the tooth against your skin, at any time you can make an immediate free recovery roll (this is not an action). For artifact level 5 and higher, add 2 to this roll.

Once you use this free recovery roll, you can't use the artifact again until after you make a ten-hour recovery roll.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each time you use it to make an extra recovery roll)

HEN BASKET

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Woven basket designed for carrying hens, along with the hen (which seems to be invested with great power)

Use: Once per day, if the **hen** is happy, she lays a blue egg. Eating the entire egg grants you training in one skill of your choice for the next day. (This can't increase your training beyond "specialized.")

Additionally, the hen acts as a lookout, easing your initiative tasks as long as she and her basket are within short range of you.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each time you eat the blue egg). Once the hen basket comes due, the hen flies away but the basket remains.

HOUND SKIN KNAPSACK

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Blue knapsack crafted from **Hound** skin. The leather is covered in dozens of eyes, each one different from the last.

Use: Any object put inside the sack can't be detected by physical senses or magic that is less than the level of the knapsack. The sack can hold a single item at a time, up to about 1 cubic foot (30 cm cube). Cyphers in the sack don't count against the bearer's cypher limit.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each time an item is added to the knapsack)

INVISIBILITY AMULET

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Triangular metal amulet filled with henbane seeds, bones, and shined mussel shell pieces

Use: When worn, the amulet provides an asset (two assets if the artifact is level 7 or higher) to hiding, sneaking, and remaining undetected for as long as the wearer does not interact with another creature. Entering into combat or interacting with another creature in any way breaks the effect.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each day)

JEWEL COMB

Level: 1d6

Form: Beautiful jeweled comb made of polished ivory, carved with vines and flowers and set with amber cabochons

Use: When worn in your hair, the comb eases Intellect defense tasks, as well as all tasks related to persuasion, intimidation, and lying. However, it whispers to you constantly, hindering all positive social interactions.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each day)

KEEPER

Level: 1d6

Form: Patch of green and gold skin from an unknown creature, preserved and cut into the shape of a cross

Use: You must bond the keeper to another artifact through a short ritual that takes one minute and involves you speaking a secret word to it. Thereafter, anyone trying to use the other artifact must speak the secret word, or it doesn't work.

Come Due: —

The hen will forage while you rest during a ten-minute, one-hour, or ten-hour recovery roll, but otherwise she remains in the basket and doesn't need anything to keep her happy other than attention and soothing words. She can't be attacked as a separate creature.

The Hounds, page 364



Kudzu man, page 367

The rumor is that the mask of stolen breath is made from the body of a miner who died in a mine fire and that whoever wears it is breathing that miner's untaken breaths. But surely that can't be right. Can it?

Memory jars are personal, made by people who loved and cared for the dead. They might be specific to one person or to an entire family. It's not wise to use a memory jar that you don't have a personal connection to, for you don't know who will hear your prayer and answer it.

It's rumored that Miss Ida's mirror cracked at the moment she passed from this world into the next. Another rumor says the mirror is most powerful under the light of the Hunter's Moon, be that power for good or ill.

KUDZU BASKET

Level: 1d6

Form: Basket woven of vines from a **kudzu man**, with a leather handle for carrying it over the shoulder

Use: This basket can contain up to one cypher per artifact level, as long as each is no larger than a typical mason jar or book. These cyphers don't count against your cypher limit.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each time a cypher is added to the basket)

MAMAW'S QUILT

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Handmade quilt that once bore a brightly colored elegant design but which is now faded and worn and has been patched many times

Use: Anyone wrapped in the quilt gains 3 Armor against Intellect damage only. Further, attempts to affect the wearer's mind are hindered (hindered by two steps if the artifact is level 7 or higher).

However, being wrapped in the quilt hinders all tasks involving physical movement, including running, jumping, climbing, and combat.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20



MASK OF STOLEN BREATH

Level: 1d6

Form: Face mask made of skin and bone that is always singed—no amount of scrubbing seems to remove the darkness

Use: Activate the mask by exhaling as hard as you can and then holding your breath while fitting the mask to your face. For the next hour, you can breathe safely and without harm, even if the air is filled with ash, smoke, poison, and so on. You can even breathe underwater or in a place where the breathable air has been depleted, like a tight space where a mine shaft has collapsed.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each hour of use)

MEMORY JAR

Level: 1d6

Form: Jar or jug coated with plaster and small trinkets (such as buttons, beads, feathers, and keys), made to honor and connect to someone who is dead

Use: When you call upon the power of the jar, the dead person honored by it will answer two questions for you. If you have a personal attachment to that person, both answers will be true. If you don't, one answer will be true and one will be false. The GM determines what the dead person might know, based on the knowledge they had in life.

Come Due: 1 in 1d6 (check each use)

MISS IDA'S MIRROR

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Round hand mirror with a simple frame of burnished white oak. There's a small crack in one part of the frame that looks like a lightning strike.

Use: If you stand before the mirror in the light of a full moon, you can contact the ghost or spirit of a person or creature you knew by at least two names. The entity's level must be equal to or below the artifact level. The entity decides whether to talk with you. If it does, it remains for up to a minute and can answer one or two questions about things it knew when it was alive.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20

MOON SHARD

Level: 1d6 + 2

Form: Broken sliver of a mirror set into a large carved bone of unknown origin

Use: This artifact can be used only at night. Using it makes it reflect a bit of the moon's light, even if the moon isn't visible in the sky. You can call upon the shard to create one of the following effects:

Harm: The beam inflicts damage equal to the artifact level on a foe within long range.

Heal: If you aim the beam at an ally within immediate range, it restores Pool points (or health, if an NPC) equal to the artifact level.

Light the Way: The shard allows all within short range to see in darkness as if it were daylight. This even works underground or in other places where the moon isn't visible, as long as it's night.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check after each use)

MOONBONE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Folding knife with an ornately carved bone handle. The bone appears to be from neither human nor animal, and the blade never needs sharpening.

Use: If you spend ten minutes teaching the knife about a specific foe by whispering stories, wrapping it in the foe's clothing, and so on, the knife's attacks on that foe inflict damage equal to the artifact level, even if the foe is immaterial.

You can choose a new foe only after the knife's current foe is dead or the knife has come due.

When not being used on its specific foe, the knife acts as a regular light weapon, easing attacks and inflicting 2 points of damage.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (roll each teaching)

MY DIARY

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Slim handbound book with the words *My Diary* written on the front in curling script and a small lock shaped like a heart

Use: Feed a bit of your blood to the lock and it will pop open, revealing pages that clearly were once written upon, but now are blank. Each day you open the diary, a record of that day's activities appear on the next page, in your handwriting. The diary never runs out of pages. If someone other than you tries to open it, make an Intellect defense roll against their level. If you succeed, they can't open it at all; if you fail, they break it open, but to them the pages are all blank.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each time you open it)

PICK OF THE WICKED

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Old, worn miner's pick with the names of the wicked carved on the handle

Use: This pick is a medium weapon. It eases all attacks made with it by one step and inflicts an additional 1 point of damage (or 2 points for artifact level 8 and higher). If you kill a wicked creature with the pick, the pick grows righteous and increases your Might Edge by 1 for an hour.

"Wicked" is a subjective term and is typically determined by the wielder's worldview, the story, and the GM. In most (but not all) cases, you will know just before you make an attack if the creature is wicked.

Come Due: 1 in 1d10 (check each time a wicked creature is killed)

It's considered bad luck to shut a knife that someone else has opened. Perhaps even more so with powerful knives like Moonbone.

Many of the carved bone artifacts found in and around Esau County, Virginia, including the fabled Moonbone, are the creation of Heloise "Ellie" Walker. Most counties or regions have at least one witch or other magic worker who is sought after for their powerful creations.

A Sator square is a particular arrangement of five words, originally in Latin, made into a palindrome, allowing them to be read the same way from left to right and right to left.

Hexenwolf, page 361
Wolf sisters, page 386

There are many powerful prayers in the world, but most who carry them guard them vehemently from theft and discovery.

PRAYER OF PROTECTION AGAINST WOLVES

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Prayer embroidered onto a piece of white cloth with red thread

Use: Read the prayer aloud beneath the moon (or a depiction of the moon). You and allies who join you in reading the prayer gain +1 Armor against attacks from wolves and wolflike creatures (including **hexenwolves** and **wolf sisters**) for the next ten minutes.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each use)

O Hunter's Moon
bringer of light and life
splitter of the night
we who walk these woods ask of you this
what wolf comes for us is turned back
what wolf comes for us is turned to stone
what wolf comes for us is shined bright
visible to all
let these words meet your light
let your light meet these beasts
let these beasts meet their ends
upon our blessed blades
~Protection prayer against wolves

ROOT MASK

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Wooden mask carved from a single root of a **haint tree**

Use: When placed on the face of a living person who's been cursed, bound, or otherwise affected by harmful magic, the mask removes the curse (up to the artifact level). If the curse level is higher than the artifact level, the mask eases the removal by two steps. The mask does not work on the same person or type of curse more than once.

Come Due: 1 in 1d6

SATOR SQUARE (LOOKOUT)

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Circular piece of wood with a Sator square carved into one side of it and scorch marks on the other side

Use: While you carry the square against your skin, it grows warm if anyone or anything is watching or listening to you, by magic or other means. The closer you are to the entity, the hotter the square grows.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each day)

SATOR SQUARE (PROTECTION)

Level: 1d6

Form: Piece of gold and yellow quilt with a red charm needle-stitched on it in the form of a Sator square

Use: When sewn onto a piece of clothing, the square adds additional protection in the form of +1 Armor. If the square is removed from the clothing, this additional Armor is lost, and the artifact comes due.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each day)



Haint tree, page 360

Curses, bindings, and other harmful magic effects are typically the same level as the creature who created them.

SCRYING EYE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Pewter hand mirror in the shape of an eye with an inscription on the back

Use: This allows you to scry (view) remote locations and creatures. You must make a difficulty 2 Intellect task to activate the mirror, then use an action asking it to show a person or location you know.

You must succeed at an Intellect task against the level of the target; otherwise, the mirror shows only indistinct or misleading images. The task roll is modified by how familiar the target is to you, how available they are to be viewed, and how far away they are.

Familiarity

Only have name or description	Hindered
Target has been visited	Eased
Target is well known to you	Eased

Availability

Target is willing	Eased
Target is unwilling	Hindered

Distance

More than 1 mile (1.5 km)	Hindered
More than 10 miles (16 km)	Hindered
More than 100 miles (160 km)	Hindered

These modifiers are cumulative, so trying to view a level 4 target who you know only by name (hindered), is unwilling (hindered), and is 20 miles (32 km) away (hindered by two steps) is a difficulty 8 task.

The mirror shows the creature or area for one minute before the image becomes muddled and the artifact must be activated again.

In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can choose to apply a level of Effort to open two-way communication with the viewed area. If you do, all creatures in the area can sense your presence and hear your voice, and the creatures can speak to and be heard by you.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20

SHADOW HELMET

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Miner's helmet made of canvas and glue that's been painted black. A small bracket on the front holds a carbide lamp.

Use: It takes a round to activate the helmet by lighting the lamp while you're wearing it. The light creates a shadow that is essentially your duplicate and is a level 2 NPC with 6 health. It obeys your commands and does as you direct it for a number of minutes equal to the artifact level.

If your duplicate is killed, you take 4 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor).

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each activation or each time your duplicate is killed)

SWEET SLEEP

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Hand-stitched pillow made of leather from a **not deer**, stuffed with dried catnip

Use: Sleep with your head on the pillow during your ten-hour recovery roll.

Doing so adds a number of points to your recovery roll equal to the artifact level.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each day)

TATTING BASKET

Level: 1d6

Form: Workbasket or sewing basket filled with the unfinished projects of previous owners, including tatting, mismatched buttons, a pincushion shaped like a tomato, wooden spools with cotton thread, stork-shaped scissors, and more

Use: Your **crafting and repairing** tasks are eased. Provides an additional asset for crafting and repairing tasks, even if that means exceeding the normal limit of two assets.

Come Due: 1 in 1d100 (check each day of use)

An unwilling creature's defenses against magic and Intellect attacks should hinder scrying attempts just as they would against a directly harmful mental spell.

Not deer, page 369

Crafting, Building, and Repairing, page 151

Many artifacts have unique names. Some tell their names to chosen people, and others are given names based on their material, use, or story. Consider giving artifacts names or encouraging the PCs to do so.

The GM should add a specific inscription that feels appropriate to the characters and the story you're telling. Rings of that era—often given before someone went off to war—typically included something like “To [name] from [name] with love” and the year, but feel free to put anything you like in there.

TIME KEEPER

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Heavy pocket watch cast in something that looks like silver but feels painful to the touch

Use: The watch does not tell time, and never has. When pressed to the skin of a foe (considered a Might- or Speed-based attack), the time keeper steals a year from their life, aging them visibly and inflicting damage equal to the artifact level.

The time keeper stores the time it steals, allowing you to reroll any single roll you wish and take the better of the two results, as if you had spent 1 XP on a reroll. The watch can hold one year (one reroll) of life at any given time.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each reroll)

UNKNOWN CALLER

Level: 1d6 + 1

Form: Unopened quartz geode with an incomprehensible creature trapped inside

Use: Warming the geode between your palms calls upon an intelligent and ancient unknown creature. You can converse with it (although you're not sure if the conversation is in a language you know or if somehow it's being translated for you), gaining a bit of information, insight, or advice.

Sometimes, this translates into an asset on one of your actions, as the creature suggests the right phrase to make friends with a shopkeeper to get a good deal, the right tools to use while tinkering with a device, or the right place to put a shield to deflect an incoming attack. Sometimes the information is more broad, such as the right road to take to reach the next town or why the creatures of the Green are stirring.

The creature's willingness and ability to converse varies considerably. Sometimes it's quite chatty and offers advice. Other times, it must be convinced, cajoled, or tricked into giving information. Still other times, it's entirely absent for reasons it won't explain.

The whisperer's knowledge base is broad but not omniscient. It can't see the future, but it can often predict outcomes based on logic. It has little to nothing to say about itself.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each use)

THE UNMAKER

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Colt pistol that came home from the war in the coffin of a dead soldier and somehow found its way into the hands of the living

Use: This is a medium long-ranged handgun.

You must use an action to waken whatever lives inside the weapon by feeding a single drop of your blood into the barrel. Thereafter, instead of bullets, the pistol fires a beam of dark shadow that unravels your foe, inflicting 5 points of damage (7 points for artifact level 8 or higher); if you succeed at an Intellect-based attack roll against a creature you just hit, they are also stunned for one round. The shadow beam affects even immaterial creatures.

Once you've awakened the pistol, it fires shadow beams instead of bullets. As part of another action, you can switch to firing bullets instead of shadows, but you'll need to feed it blood again if you want to fire more shadow beams.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each shadow beam attack)

WITH LOVE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Two gold wedding bands, each with a matching inscription inside that is barely legible, as well as the year “1915”

Use: Place one ring on your finger and one on someone else's. While you both wear the rings, you can communicate telepathically with that person, up to a maximum range of 10 miles (16 km) per artifact level.

Come Due: 1 in 1d20 (check each day the rings are used for telepathy)



The big black wolf that was Miss Darla narrowed her eyes and growled at the other two, who sped off into the night in the direction of the Clutch. Miss Darla bared her fangs like nightmares and prepared to charge Melvin, but found herself looking into a fine silver mirror. It, too, was carved of bone, and the reflection she saw there made her quivering lips drop.

And Melvin's hand in the mirror began to quake and emit a pale blue light. It grew terrible cold in his hand and he dropped it and the big wolf looked down into the reflection, mesmerized as a single human hand, black as night, reached up out of the mirror. And Melvin stood stunned as the opening of the mirror seemed to stretch wide as a whole-ass grown woman climbed from its inky depths. Melvin could see that it had the same shape and silhouette as Miss Darla, but he could see no features, no three dimensions, if you will. It was like the woman's shadow had stepped from the mirror.

Miss Darla had already changed her shape and stood facing her shadow as if looking in a full-length mirror. Tears streaming down her face as the shadow started to fill out, started to take her form, and if a shadow takes your full form, there can only be one of you and—many times, there ain't going to be none of you. Before there were two identical women standing in the parking lot of Rising Creek Baptist, the shadow woman pulled Darla into an embrace. There was a dim pulse of blue light as the shadow woman passed through Miss Darla and vanished.

—A Once-Told Tale: The Wolf Sisters Part Three



Chapter 20:

HAINTS, SPIRITS, AND OTHER REVENANTS

There is something about this place that draws the inexplicable, the monstrous, the beastly, and the brutal. Those that stalk the darkness, rise into the light, and breathe somewhere in between are dangerous, unpredictable, and completely unknowable.

Although this chapter breaks creatures down into useful stats for ease at the game table, the numbers matter far less than the *feeling* that these creatures impart upon the characters. You should use the stats as guidelines for how scary, dangerous, and damaging a creature might be, but it's the *essence* of the creatures that should give your players (and their characters) a true understanding of just how scared (or weirded out, or any other emotion) they should be. Really dig into the language and descriptions to bring these unfathomable creatures to life at the table.

Of course, there are far more beings skulking, swimming, flying, and prowling through alternate Appalachia than are included in this chapter. Don't hesitate to use these creatures and the mythos of Appalachia as a guideline when building your own.

UNDERSTANDING THE LISTINGS

Every creature is presented by its name, followed by a standard template that includes the following categories.

Level: Like the difficulty of a task, each creature has a level attached to it. You use the level to determine the target number a PC must reach to attack or defend against the opponent. In each entry, the difficulty number for the creature is listed in parentheses after its level. As shown on the following table, the target number is three times the level.

Level	Target Number
1	3
2	6
3	9
4	12
5	15
6	18
7	21
8	24
9	27
10	30

Description: Following the name of the creature is a general description of its appearance, nature, intelligence, or background.



Decades of pine needles carpeting the floor of Death Island shifted and congealed. The earth tore itself from centuries of black sleep, bringing with it the bones of animals and men and things that had died or been buried in this land before it had ever been pushed to one side to make room for a manmade lake. Bones twisted and writhed, crafting themselves into a shape that in a long-bygone era might have been called a wolf, but by the standards of our time could be named nothing less than a monster.

Its head was easily the size of an entire bear; its body, just as thick with a hide of pine needles, earth, bark, and bone. The angles and proportions of its legs were all wrong, somehow lupine and feline at the same time, but tipped in claws fashioned from the skulls of long-dead raptors that had not graced the skies of this Appalachia in a thousand years.

It had no eyes—just a massive maw of fangs shaped from stones and roots and petrified bits of tree. And its muzzle was tipped with an immense nose that snorted and snuffled at the air as it stood over Sam and the empty husk of Cowboy Absher and roared.

—Season 2, Episode 15: A Funeral in Pine

Belongs To: Many entities in alternate Appalachia belong to or are affiliated with one of two opposing forces, the Green or the Inner Dark. If the entity has an affiliation, it's listed here. This entry doesn't appear in the game stats if a creature has no affiliation.

Motive: This entry is a way to help the GM understand what a creature wants. Every creature wants something, even if it's just to be left alone.

Environment: This entry describes whether the creature tends to be solitary or travel in groups and what kind of terrain it typically inhabits (such as "They live deep in the woods where wise humans fear to tread").

Health: A creature's target number is usually also its health, which is the amount of damage it can sustain before it is dead or incapacitated. For easy reference, the entries always list a creature's health, even when it's the normal amount for a creature of its level.

Damage Inflicted: Generally, when creatures hit in combat, they inflict their level in damage regardless of the form of attack. Some inflict more or less or have a special modifier to damage. Intelligent NPCs often use weapons, but this is more a flavor issue than a mechanical one. In other words, it doesn't matter if a level 3 creature uses a sword or claws—it deals the same damage if it hits. The entries always specify the number of points of damage inflicted, even if it's the normal amount for a creature of its level.

Armor: This is the creature's **Armor** value. Sometimes the number represents physical armor, and other times it represents natural protection. This entry doesn't appear in the game stats if a creature has no Armor.

Movement: Movement determines how far the creature can move in a single turn. Creatures have movements of immediate, short, or long, which equate to the **ranges** of the same name.

Most PCs have an effective movement of short, so if they are chasing (or being chased by) a creature with immediate movement, their Speed tasks for chases are eased by one step; if the creature's movement is long, the PCs' Speed tasks are hindered by one step.

Armor, page 124

Ranges, page 144

Modifications: This entry indicates when the creature should be treated as if it were higher or lower level. For example, the entry for a level 4 creature might say “defends as level 5,” which means PCs attacking it must reach a target number of 15 (for difficulty 5) instead of 12 (for difficulty 4). In special circumstances, some creatures have other modifications, but these are almost always specific to their level.

Combat: This entry gives advice on using the creature in combat, such as “This creature uses ambushes and hit-and-run tactics.”

At the end of the combat listing, you’ll also find any special abilities, such as immunities, **poison**, and healing skills. GMs should remember to be logical about a creature’s reaction to a particular action or attack by a PC. For example, a creature that uses poison might be immune to being poisoned themselves, while a creature that’s defending its kin might fight more fiercely.

Interaction: This entry gives advice on using the creature in interactions, such as “These creatures are willing to talk but respond poorly to threats,” or “This creature is an animal and acts like an animal.”

Use: This entry gives the GM suggestions for how to use the creature in a game session. It might provide general notes or specific adventure ideas.

Loot: This entry indicates what the PCs might gain if they take items from their fallen foes (or trade with or trick them). It doesn’t appear in the game stats if the creature has no loot.

Connection: These are suggested ways for the GM to create a connection between the creature and one or more of the PCs. Perhaps the ghostly hitcher looks like a dead (or living) relative or the PC has been dreaming of the Hounds and didn’t realize it until just this moment.

GM Intrusions: This entry suggests one or more ways to use **GM intrusion** in an encounter with the creature. These are just ideas, and the GM is encouraged to come up with their own uses of the game mechanic.

CREATURES BY LEVEL

Red dog	2
Shuck	2
Tommyknocker	2
Wrongness	2
Blank-eyed man	3
Lamp-eyed dead	3
Not deer	3
Raw Head and Bloody Bones	3
Snallygaster	3
Beast of the dark earth	4
The Boy	4
Crossroads dealer	4
Ghostly hitcher	4
Hexenwolf	4
Skin Tom	4
Haint tree	5
Hollow Man	5
Wampus	5
Water horse	5
Witch	5
Wolf sister	5
The Hounds	6
Kudzu man	6
White thing	6
Beloved light	7
Gray Ladies	7
The Railroad Man	7
J.T. Fields III	8
The Witch Queen	8
The Dead Queen	9
The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not	10

Poison, page 143

For additional information about the Green and the Inner Dark, see page 188.

GM intrusion, page 162



She heard a soft shuffling sound behind her, something sneaking through the underbrush, and Maggie's heart leapt up in her throat. Was it the bears Granny had warned her about? Or a stalking catamount? She froze, tense and wary, but heard nothing more.

Stop acting like a baby, she told herself. It hadn't been very loud. It was just a possum or a raccoon—maybe a fox slinking out of its den. At worst it might be a skunk—*shooo-weee!* she'd be in trouble for sure if she got sprayed—but that was all. It was dusk now, time for all the evening critters to start stirring. It was not a bear, nor a catamount—it couldn't even be a deer. Hadn't sounded big enough.

—Black Mouthed Dog, Episode 0: Prologue

NORMAL ANIMALS

Unlike most creatures in this chapter, normal animals are simple and understandable enough to be encapsulated by just a name and a few stats.

Bear, black: level 3, attacks as level 4

Catamount: level 4; stealth, stalking, and initiative as level 5

Copperhead: level 2; bite inflicts 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor)

Deer, white-tailed: level 3

Dog: level 2, perception as level 3

Dog, guard: level 3, attacks and perception as level 4

Fox: level 2

Hawk: level 2; flies a long distance each round

Horse: level 3; moves a long distance each round

Moose: level 5; health 20; antlers inflict 7 points of damage

Rat: level 1

Red wolf: level 3, perception as level 4

CREATURE GROUPS

Combat in this game moves quickly enough that a GM should not hesitate to use large groups of creatures as challenges for PCs, particularly powerful PCs. To make things easier, the GM can take any creature and have a group of six to ten of them attack en masse as a single creature that is 2 levels higher, inflicting double the original creature's normal damage. So six level 3 lamp-eyed dead might attack as a level 5 mob.



GENERAL NPCs

There are any number of characters who you might want to add to your game. This box lists a few general ones, but if you don't see an NPC here that you'd like to include, it's okay to create one. For the most part, a regular person that the PCs might meet is probably level 2. A trained person, such as a healer or sheriff, is generally level 3 or perhaps level 4, with some unique modifications to their skills and experience. Someone with a lot of power, such as an NPC who's made a bargain with the Green or another potent entity, could be level 4 or 5.

Additionally, many NPCs in this setting might have further modifications that are related to their occupations, interests, or lifestyles, including:

- Crafting powerful objects as 1 or 2 levels higher
- Understanding or using magic or knowing the unknowable as 2 or 3 levels higher
- Mining, farming, train hopping, or working with animals as 1 or 2 levels higher

Adding a modification is a simple and interesting way to deepen an NPC's personality and give them a unique way of interacting with the PCs and the world.

Boss: level 3; deception, persuasion, intimidation, and tasks related to friendly interaction as level 7

Guard: level 2, perception as level 3

"Handyman": level 3, discretion, intimidation, and stealth as level 4; carries a weapon and a bag of heavy tools

Healer, doctor, or granny: level 3, all healing tasks as level 5; carries a small assortment of healing items or cyphers

Mayor/Politician: level 2, all interaction tasks as level 7

Miner: level 2, mining as level 3; carries a mining axe

Regular person: level 2

Sheriff: level 4

Veteran: level 4, perception tasks as level 5; attacks inflict 5 points of damage

Best dog or goodest cat: level 2; danger sense, detection, searching, and perception as level 3

In this case, a handyman isn't someone who comes over and fixes something in your house. It's someone who fixes something in your life, usually through discretion, the right tools, and maybe a bit of intimidation.



But then his momma called on a 'handyman' who had done work for their family for years. A trusted old army buddy of her late husband, a man who knew how to take care of things. A man who could clean this up and who knew how to be discreet and how not to be seen when he is about his business.

—A Once-Told Tale: The Wolf Sisters Part One

Sam the Fearless and Good: level 3; Speed defense as level 5; all skills involving his loved ones (such as protection, danger sense, and so on) as level 5. Sam is old and blind, but love (and magic) keep him alive. He typically manages to escape harm and is magically protected from death.



The response was immediate: the sound of running paws coming through the Green. *Sam!* To anyone else, it would look like the old, blind beagle was running in random directions, taking wide loops around some trees and jumping way further than he had to over some small piles of stones and leaves, but to Caleb's new eyes, he could see that Sam was avoiding all the dangerous pulses of energy, all the dark green snares that would snatch an intruder, as if he could see them all plain as day.

—Season 2, Episode 17:
The Boy Who Could Not Die



Remember that the death of an animal, especially of a beloved pet, is usually traumatic and devastating. Make sure you have your players' consent before considering this option. Or better yet, know that it's okay to fudge things a bit when it comes to animals (they have additional health or extra Armor, they're magically protected, and so on) so they're always safe from death.



Stories of the woolyboogers that would carry him off if he went to bed without saying his prayers. Long-ago stories about a giant looking for his big toe, and of the witch woman who might come in the night and try to carry off little boys who were out of bed after the lights done put out. It's a delicate balance to teach a boy to be both brave enough and scared enough to live in the world at ten years old. It's a balance that can sometimes go . . . all kinds of wrong.

—Season 2, Episode 12: The Other Queen

BELOVED LIGHT

7 (21)

The beloved light is intended to be a dangerous but resourceful entity that characters can interact with if they're desperate enough. She can provide almost any sort of aid, but it's always at a cost, and the specific price is unknown until the debt must be paid.

Some strange places in the woods are haunted by a sphere of burning light surrounded by electrical bolts of power. But this is no uncommon manifestation of weather. Her (and she is most definitely a her) tendrils of light caress and pry at the earth and the strange not-dead trees of her sacred grove, sending out silent chords of power that ripple through the area like music. When she speaks, it is mind to mind, her blinding head rising to reveal an eye that appears dark only because the light of her is too bright.

She has the secret knowledge. She knows the lost paths. She is the curse and the promise and the reward and the price. She knows the many things that you want—you have but to ask her for them. She is not of the Green or the Inner Dark, but something else, something unknowable and dangerous, but with the power to create and destroy, heal and sicken, find and bury.

Character abilities, page 21

Dazzled, your mind says *mother*. Your mind says *beloved*. Your mind says *run* and *retreat* and *no*.

This, this is what you have come for. *She* is who you have come for.

She lifts her blinding head, one eye black and deep as a coal mine, and she says, "Ask."

Motive: Make bargains for an unknown purpose

Environment: Remote blasted groves in the woods associated with her power

Health: 28

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 3 (immune to electricity)

Movement: Short

Modifications: Speed defense as level 3 due to size; resists poison and fungus as level 4; attacks plants and structures as level 8

Combat: The beloved light can lash out with up to three short-range tendrils of light each round. A struck creature must also succeed at an Intellect defense task or become befuddled for a few rounds, hindering all of their tasks by two steps. Instead of making two tendril attacks, the beloved can perform a supernatural feat, such as healing herself or another for 10 points of damage, moving a creature a long distance, turning invisible for a round or two, or afflicting a creature with a wasting sickness that moves them one step down the damage track each minute. By focusing her attention, she can send or receive thoughts up to a few miles, transport herself to any of her groves, bless a creature (such as granting an asset to a particular task, adding 1 to one Edge stat, or gifting someone with a new **character ability**), or remove her favor from someone.

As part of another action, the beloved light can move any number of creatures within long range up to a short distance closer to herself if they fail an Intellect defense roll. Some moving characters might walk under their own power, and others might be dragged like steel pulled by a magnet.

The beloved light's presence is distracting; tasks relating to anything other than attacking, defending, or interacting with her are hindered by two steps. A character can overcome this single-mindedness for a few rounds by succeeding on an Intellect defense roll.

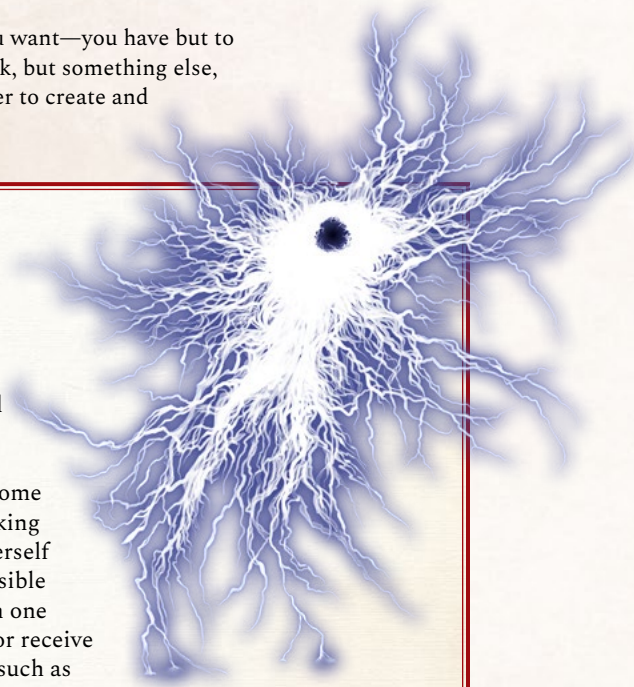
Interaction: The beloved light limits her communications to asking simple telepathic questions within long range. A visitor seeking a bargain with her often doesn't know for minutes or hours if she has agreed to provide what they asked for. Only when the item, creature, or information appears from another source in a seeming coincidence is it clear that the agreement is in effect.

Use: Characters seeking help with a greater foe are pointed toward the beloved light's grove.

Loot: After the beloved light goes, she sometimes leaves behind a piece of herself in the soil. Gathering two bits of fossilized lightning creates a cypher that allows you and another willing creature to interact telepathically for the next 24 hours up to a mile away.

Connection: The character knows a bit of a prayer or hymn that can call the beloved light or make her more inclined to help.

GM Intrusions: The beloved light's lightning tendril also paralyzes a character for a minute if they fail an Intellect defense roll. The beloved light ends a protective or useful effect on a character (such as a cypher or defensive ability with a duration).



BLANK-EYED MAN

3 (9)



She learned, though, that she had to be very careful when she told [the Six Men] what to do. Once, she told them to fetch wood to build her a new privy and off into the woods they went. Two hours later they came back with wood that had already been painted and nailed—clearly torn from an existing house. The men's hands were bloody—their faces spattered with it. She told them to stand still and not move. She proceeded to make the hour-long walk to where a new homestead had appeared about a year earlier in the next big holler over. She found the young family there dead. Even the children. Beaten and strangled. Pieces of the front porch and door had been torn away. Torn away and carried to her valley.

—Season 1, Episode 6: The Witch Queen Chapter II: Doubt

The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not, page 376

Although these beings are called “blank-eyed men,” they can be created out of any human, regardless of gender.

Daughter Dooley, the Witch Queen (page 384), has six blank-eyed men who serve her; she calls them the Six Men.

Blank-eyed men are people who have been converted to mindless puppets by *The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not*, given to his minions and used for simple labor. These poor souls dress like local people from the area (and probably were such, before being reduced to their current state) and might be tall, short, scrawny, strong, or anything in between. They feel no pain and have blank eyes, slack jaws, and no facial expressions. They breathe shallowly but don't actually need to breathe at all, nor do they require food or water, and they never speak. They have no desires or will of their own, simply following orders to the letter. Some have rudimentary human skills that linger from when they were fully human; for example, one might know how to drive a wagon or handle a horse.



Belongs To: The Inner Dark (*The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not*)

Motive: Serve *The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not* or whoever they are given to

Environment: Anywhere their master needs them, alone or in groups

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Might-based tasks and Intellect defense as level 5

Combat: Blank-eyed men attack with weapons or their freakishly strong bare hands. They are nearly mindless, able to follow simple strategies if commanded to do so but defaulting to direct aggression.

Blank-eyed men have no souls; they move because the will and power of *The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not* animates them. If a blank-eyed man is reduced to 0 health or otherwise killed, they revive a few rounds later at full health and resume their previous activities as if nothing had happened.

Because they're half dead, they never tire. They can run at full speed all day, even if carrying a heavy load, but they do so only if instructed to by their master, and normally walk at the speed of a casual stroll.

Interaction: Blank-eyed men can follow orders but have no thoughts, desires, or will of their own. They interpret commands in the simplest, most literal way, without concern for themselves or others. They never speak.

Use: A witch or entity of the Inner Dark is guarded by blank-eyed men. Strange, silent men are walking through the woods, their fists and faces spattered with blood.

Loot: Whatever was given to them for their mission, such as a letter, weapon, or cypher.

Connection: A blank-eyed man—or the living person they used to be—is someone a character knew.

GM Intrusions: The blank-eyed man lacks any sense of self-preservation; the character's attack automatically hits, but the blank-eyed man immediately attacks the character twice. (These attacks happen even if the character's attack would kill the blank-eyed man.)

The blank-eyed man's eerily emotionless response unnerves the character, hindering them by two steps for a few rounds.

THE BOY

4 (12)



The Boy can be killed, but because he is a spirit of vengeance, he will eventually reappear when he is needed.

Group of dead boys:
level 3, stealth as level 6; supernatural attack inflicts 4 points of Might or Speed damage (ignores Armor); see in darkness as if daylight; can become visible or invisible as their action

The Blue Ghost, page 333

"He said he'd been down in the mines for a long time, too. Said he knew how awful being a boy in the mines could be . . . Told me if I wanted to, I could help him make sure nothing like this happened to other boys."

—Season 2, An Interlude: The Scenic Route

The Boy appears as a child of maybe ten years, wearing work overalls that are a little too big for him, dirty with soot, sometimes wearing a cap, and always carrying an oil lantern. His eyes are black, the color of shovel dust, flat and dead . . . but not empty. He is not a mere ghost or haint, but a spirit of death-black vengeance stuffed into the shape of a boy who speaks with a man's voice and whose true form (briefly visible to those with the sight) is a scarecrow made of burning black breath.

His purpose is to find, terrorize, and kill those who are responsible for the deaths of young people in mines, confronting them in the dark. He knows the crimes and secrets of his chosen prey, including those who believe that mine injuries and deaths are part of the cost of doing business.

The Boy is accompanied by the shades or haints of a dozen or more **dead boys**, all of whom died because of the mines. They lurk invisibly and intangibly until The Boy wants them to appear and help frighten or attack his chosen target. When visible, they look as they did in their last moments—dirty, angry, bearing the injuries that killed them, and hungry for the lives that were stolen from them.

Motive: Vengeance for boys killed in mines

Environment: Anywhere in or near mines

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short; teleportation

Modifications: Defenses as level 5; stealth as level 6

Combat: The Boy doesn't attack his chosen target directly. Accidents, mishaps, injuries, and death happen to his targets, in frightening ways appropriate to the person he hunts. He might drop or tip over his lantern to ignite gas within a mine and cause a collapse, inflicting fire and crushing damage. The target might take Speed damage from choking on coal dust and bad air, or Intellect damage from horrifying visions while they're awake or asleep. These "attacks" ignore Armor and repeat each round, and might originate from The Boy or the spirits with him.

The Boy and the haints who accompany him can see in the dark as if it were daylight. As his action, The Boy can teleport up to a very long distance away, instantly vanishing and (because he brings his lantern with him) plunging his previous location into darkness. The haint boys continue attacking for several rounds (which is usually enough to finish the job), then vanish.

Interaction: The Boy wants his target to know why they're being attacked and to fear this supernatural retribution. He (or the haints) might converse with other people if it helps them find someone they're looking for, but they don't allow themselves to be distracted or persuaded from the goal of vengeance.

Use: A mine boss has been acting erratic and jumpy for the past few days, as if he hasn't been sleeping, and seems unnerved by a group of boys working in the mine. Workers at an unlucky, dangerous mine claim to have seen a ghost of a dead boy with a lantern deep underground.

Loot: The Boy sometimes carries the **Blue Ghost** and might offer a version of it to someone he deems worthy. If someone tries to take the artifact from him, it simply disappears.

Connection: A character was close to a young person who was killed in the mines. A character thinks they recognize The Boy or one of the shades with him.

GM Intrusions: After an encounter with The Boy, the character must succeed at a hindered Intellect defense roll or become terrified of the dark. They gain no benefit from recovery rolls unless they are in light at least as bright as candlelight the entire time.

The character must succeed at an Intellect defense roll or become terrified at the sight of The Boy or one of his shades, dropping what they're carrying and fleeing at full speed for at least a minute.



CROSSROADS DEALER

4 (12)

This enigmatic figure looks like a moderately handsome human who isn't quite remarkable-looking enough to be easily described or overly noticed. They usually dress fancy, but not too fancy compared to those around them. A dirt-poor farmer or miner might see the Dealer wearing a well-mended outfit suitable for Easter Sunday. A shopkeeper might see them dressed like one of the mine bosses or a mine boss's wife, not a speck of dirt on them, like they'd never done a day of hard labor in their life. A company man might see them in a well-tailored suit and polished shoes, perhaps with a clever hat and a pocket square, something straight out of New York City.

Sometimes instead of footprints, their feet leave marks on the ground in the shape of goat's hooves. Other times, the sound of jangling chains accompany their movements. Often, they're described as having one pewter eye.

The Dealer makes deals with mortals, giving them not money or fame, but knowledge, power, or talent, with skill in music being a common ask.

Although many religious folk think the Crossroads Dealer is actually the Devil, they seem to be more an entity of bad luck and mischief rather than sin and damnation. The Dealer is not without kindness or compassion, and has said that they just want to harden and strengthen the people of Appalachia to better withstand the temptations and darkness in the land. And yet, they trick people and bargain for their souls, so their motives are suspect.

Motive: Making bargains, temptation, and trickery
Environment: Anywhere, particularly at a crossroads
Health: 15
Damage Inflicted: 4 points
Armor: 1
Movement: Short

Modifications: Perception, trickery, and granting magical gifts as level 6

Combat: The Dealer rarely sticks around more than a round or two in a fight, preferring to vanish in the blink of an eye.

The Dealer can grant a mortal a boon in exchange for a deal (usually the mortal's soul) or as a prize for a contest (such as a music or riddling competition). Typical boons include valuable information (such as the location of an ally or enemy), any effect that a level 6 cypher could perform, or any **medium- or long-term benefit** the character qualifies for (such as training in a skill, learning a language or a new character ability, or a **character advancement**).

As an action, the Dealer can transform themselves into any animal other than a dove. In animal form, they keep all of their statistics and abilities, including speaking, and can do anything that sort of animal can do.

Interaction: The Dealer starts off as pleasant but mysterious, using wordplay and gentle lies to confuse people into thinking they've gotten the better of them.

Use: A witch warns against lingering at a nearby crossroads known to be a lurking place of the Dealer. The Dealer makes a sudden appearance and has a challenge for the characters.

Loot: The Dealer carries a couple of cyphers, such as **crow baby** and a **charm of protection**, and might have an interesting artifact like an **accursed fiddle**.

Connection: The character has heard stories of a trickster who waits at the crossroads to make a deal. The character's recent ancestor lived a very long time, supposedly the prize in a contest with the Dealer.

GM Intrusions: The Dealer glares at the character using their pewter eye, and the character must succeed at a hindered Intellect defense roll or move one step down the damage track. After a character trades their soul to the Dealer, a later dangerous event suddenly gets much worse—a task is hindered by four steps, an attack moves them an additional step down the damage track, or they must succeed at two defense rolls instead of one—with the sound of the Dealer's polite chuckle in their ears.

The Dealer sometimes claims to be the Devil, other times claims to be Death, and occasionally says they're just a mere mortal like any other.

Medium- and long-term benefits, page 164

Character Advancement, page 166

Unless the players are very excited about a riddle challenge, it's best to handle riddles as a series of Intellect-based tasks of increasing difficulty.

Crow baby, page 319

Charm of protection, page 317

Accursed fiddle, page 333



THE DEAD QUEEN

9 (27)

To the people of Good Mother Ministries (page 232), the Dead Queen is called the Good Mother and is worshipped as an angel of vengeance.

The Dead Queen is not of the Inner Dark or the Green—she is something else, more powerful than what those two forces have been able to harness or destroy. The two sides work together every seven years to bind her in a ritual that keeps her buried under the earth. But when the ritual needs to be renewed, she is free to stop them—and sometimes, somehow, she escapes early. Denied a full life and motherhood, now death on a grand scale is her goal; there is not enough death in the world to let her heart truly know peace.

The Dead Queen is not too tall, pale like a ghost, her leaf-tangled hair hanging in tatters, and her bones pressing up against her skin. Her clothing is old and rotted, and her scent is the stench of fever and sweat-soaked bandages. Her baby is scrawny, with old eyes that glow like fireflies.



The earth that surrounds what was once her grave is devoid of life, and every plant or tree that sprung from it is dead. That place is watched by both grannies and haints with equal fear and trepidation. Her half of the wood is dried and singing poplar; the wind always a soft song of burial.

—Season 2, Episode 12: The Other Queen



Motive: Murder

Environment: Woods and settlements, especially near where she is buried

Health: 33

Damage Inflicted: 9 points

Armor: 3

Movement: Short

Modifications: Might-based tasks, Might defense, and Intellect defense as level 10

Combat: The Dead Queen is immensely strong, able to tear off a grown man's head with her bare hands. She makes one or two melee attacks per round, whether these attacks are punches, clawing with her fingers, or merely grasping and squeezing.

The Dead Queen is surrounded by death magic, automatically inflicting 1 point of damage (ignores Armor) on every creature within short range at the start of her turn. As an action, she can concentrate some of this energy at one creature within short range, inflicting 9 points of damage (ignores Armor) on a failed Might defense roll. She recovers health equal to the amount of damage this death magic inflicts (whether passively from an area, as a directed attack, or both).

Her magical powers include (but are not limited to) the following, each of which she can perform as an action:

Create two of her **beasts of the dark earth**, which follow her mental commands up to very long range. She can destroy any number of them at any distance as part of another action.

Paralyze a person within long range, preventing them from moving, breathing, or even falling down. The affected character can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to break free; each minute they remain paralyzed and not breathing, they move one step down the damage track. This paralysis persists even if the character takes damage.

Create an earthquake in a short radius within very long range, lasting three rounds.

Structures and terrain move one step down the **object damage track** each round and shed debris and rubble. Creatures in the area take 3 points of damage each round due to the general shaking, or 6 points of damage if they're in or adjacent to anything shedding debris.

Imbue a helpless creature with death magic so they instinctively summon one or more beasts of the dark earth when harmed or threatened; the beasts indiscriminately attack everything in the area (except the imbued character) for several rounds, then expire.

Curse a helpless creature with a strange affliction, such as seeing everything through a veil of death or being nauseated by all food.

Control a sleeping character within long range like a puppet. This lasts minutes or hours, during which time the person thinks they're dreaming even as their body obeys the Dead Queen's silent commands. The character can attempt to break free with a new Intellect defense roll each minute.

Interaction: The Dead Queen only wants to bring death to the world. She cannot be persuaded or befriended, but she might (briefly) watch over someone she plans to ensnare and curse.

Use: Someone spotted a ragged-looking woman in the forest carrying a sick-looking infant. Bloody small footprints lead away from a grisly murder scene.

Loot: Leavings from the Dead Queen's body or clothing can be combined to create enough paralyzing poison to coat one or two weapons.

Connection: The character knows a witch or haint who once performed the ritual to imprison the Dead Queen. The character lost a loved one to the Dead Queen.

GM Intrusions: The Dead Queen conjures up a few more beasts of the dark earth as part of another action.

The Dead Queen uses her strength to hurl a character a short distance, inflicting 8 points of damage, stunning them for a few rounds on a failed Might defense roll, and breaking one of their limbs (all actions with that limb are hindered by two steps until it is healed).

The Dead Queen is usually accompanied by at least two beasts of the dark earth (page 356), or more if she expects powerful foes.

Object damage track, page 146

BEAST OF THE DARK EARTH

4 (I2)



The Dead Queen, page 354

You can use these game statistics for a single creature about the size of a dog or wolf, or for a pack of smaller creatures such as rats, possums, bats, or spiders.

Instead of the beast's Armor representing thick hide or deflection of attacks, it resists damage by having a weird anatomy, lack of vital organs, and the tendency for its flesh to reshape around an incoming attack.

If a beast of the dark earth has the shape of a flying creature such as a bat, it can fly a short distance each round instead of its normal ground-based movement.

The things that walk these woods are worse than dead. Sometimes rotten things made of flesh, but other creatures born of the sinews of trees, formed of tangled roots and mottled bark, forgotten bones long buried in the palace of the green raised up and dressed in new raiments of vine and briar, leaves and shadow, carefully crafted into the wondrous and horrible new forms to do the bidding of their dark mother; their matriarch; their monarch.

—Season 2, Episode 12: The Other Queen

One of the more direct and dangerous powers of the Dead Queen is her ability to create semi-living minions out of bones, death, fouled earth, dead plant matter, and debris. These rotting beasts of the dark earth are misshapen approximations of true animals, with weirdly bent limbs, extra jaws or eyes, and misplaced body parts. Some are even composed of pieces from multiple animals. Their bodies are covered in scabs, and they chew on themselves and each other like rabid beasts afflicted with mange. Their bodies ripple as they move, and under the best circumstances they look half starved. Their eyes sometimes glow, especially when they're about to strike at their prey.

Belongs To: The Inner Dark (the Dead Queen)

Motive: Serving the Dead Queen, killing

Environment: Anywhere near the Dead Queen, alone or in groups

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short

Modifications: Perception as level 5

Combat: A beast of the dark earth attacks with a combination of bites, claws, and stings appropriate to its form, altogether inflicting 4 points of damage.

Interaction: These things are nearly mindless, and their actions are driven by the subconscious will of the Dead Queen. The beasts can't be reasoned with or manipulated, as they are little more than rough shapes held together by dark magic, without any sense of self-preservation.

Use: A pack of strange animals is seen lurking near an abandoned old house. Beasts are making wet, sick-sounding noises just out of sight on a dark night.

Loot: The arrival of the beasts of the dark earth might churn up treasures from underground, including one or two cyphers, some coins, and a useful tool.

Connection: A character spotted one of these beasts in the moonlight and somehow escaped its attention. A character found the discarded remnants of one of these things in the daylight, but when they returned to look again, they saw only a slick stain.

GM Intrusions: The beast forms or uses a second set of jaws to make an additional attack on its turn, inflicting damage and hindering the character's actions for a few rounds from the ferocity of the attack. The thing howls, paralyzing one character for several rounds with a mix of horror and fascination on a failed Intellect defense roll.



GHOSTLY HITCHER

4 (12)

There are so many, lost along the edges of the roads, these souls of sorrow and despair. They wander eternal, seeking something. For some, it is to finally arrive home, after being so long lost. For others, it is revenge upon the one who took their lives, whether on purpose or by accident. And for still others, it is to feel something human and alive, if only for the briefest of candle flickers.



Motive: Find their way home; exact revenge upon their (perceived) killers; feel alive again

Environment: Along existing and defunct roads and paths, particularly near bridges, dangerous stretches, and steep embankments

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Persuasion as level 5

Combat: Ghostly hitchers don't take damage from mundane physical sources, but they take half damage from spells and attacks that direct energy, and full damage from weapons and items designed to affect spirits, psychic attacks, and similar attacks.

Malevolent ghostly hitchers attack those who, in some way, represent or remind them of their killers. Their touch inflicts 4 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor).

Even ghostly hitchers who are not malevolent create such a deep feeling of despair and sadness, just by being nearby, that they inflict 1 point of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) each round on everyone who can see them or sense their presence.

Interaction: Sometimes, it's unclear that a ghostly hitcher is anything other than someone needing a ride; it's only later that they show their true nature. Most seek something from those they encounter, and some will reward those who help them, often by showing them the way to a buried cache of cyphers, giving them a helpful warning, or guiding them onto the right path.

Use: The characters are making their way down an old path overgrown with kudzu vines when they realize they're standing on a buried bridge. They see a young woman, asking for help. She is trying to get home and promises to tell the characters something useful about the area in return.

Loot: Ghostly hitchers usually don't carry objects, though some might have a keepsake (like an amulet showing the face of a loved one) or a cypher.

Connection: The ghostly hitcher resembles—or, in fact, is—a friend or family member. The ghostly hitcher is wearing something that one of the characters lost or gave away a long time ago.

GM Intrusions: The ghostly hitcher attempts to possess a character. Characters who fail an Intellect defense roll are possessed until they find a way to push it out (such as succeeding on an Intellect roll or using an ability). While possessed, the character acts just like the ghostly hitcher did when they were alive.

GRAY LADIES

7 (21)

*The Thing Whose Name
Sounds Like Horned Head But
Is Not, page 376*

The three Gray Ladies are inhuman creatures who serve **The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not**, seeking to return artifacts that have been taken from him. He filled three willing human vessels with minds torn screaming from the Inner Dark, gestated them in the hearts of rotting trees, then birthed them into the world as his servants and daughters.

They travel in the forms of pale (almost paper-gray) women with ramrod-straight posture, large gray eyes, and pale gray, silver, or blonde hair. They prefer an older but near-timeless look, usually in a black dress with a high collar. One looks like a young woman, and the other two are middle aged and older, yet still well preserved. Their true forms are horrific, with wide mouths full of lamprey-like teeth, the gray skin of a deep sea fish, and long arms like tubes, but most who see their true shape don't live to talk about it, for they are strong enough to tear a person in half with their bare hands or throw a church pew across a room.

*The Gray Ladies operate alone
or in a trio. If you encounter
one, be alert for two more. If
you find two, know there is a
third nearby.*





With her prize in hand and the problem of her groom eliminated, Effie turned her attention to the pastor. Great Uncle Frank had tripped and fallen as he tried to scramble back from the scene before him and now cowered against the altar, his eyes squeezed shut, hands clasped before him as he sputtered every prayer he'd ever known. And Effie smiled as her limbs began to twist and elongate, her skin darkening, becoming the gray of sharkskin, of a coelacanth's belly, of things that had never seen the light of day and never would. "Your god can't help you here," she said sweetly as her jaw spread impossibly wide, and she struck at him, quick as an eel, with a maw full of razor-sharp teeth.

—The Holiest Days of Bone and Shadow, Chapter Three:
Something Old, Something New

Belongs To: The Inner Dark (The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not)

Motive: Reclaim artifacts for their master

Environment: Anywhere their master's artifacts might be found, alone or in a group of three

Health: 21

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Initiative and defense against magic of the Inner Dark as level 8 (and see below)

Combat: A Gray Lady attacks twice per round, using combinations of biting with her sharp teeth, slashing with her long fingernails, or bashing with her distorted, inhuman limbs, inflicting 7 points of damage regardless of the attack. If she hits with a limb, her foe must succeed at a Might defense roll or be grabbed, taking automatic damage every round on her turn. A grabbed creature can escape on their turn with a successful Might or Speed defense roll.

The Gray Ladies have a shared mind—each knows what the other knows, but they have their own thoughts, ways, and dark gifts. The first is incredibly fast (easing all of her Speed tasks) and can easily and quickly devour a creature the size of an adult human, leaving nothing behind but a bloodstain. The second has a beguiling voice (easing all persuasion tasks) and enjoys grappling her foes with tentacles and loose flesh, restraining them until they succeed at a Might or Speed defense roll to escape. The third slashes with her rotting claws of bone, disemboweling her foe (moving them one step down the damage track) on a failed Might defense roll.

Gray Ladies can sense the general location of artifacts related to the Inner Dark within long range.

A Gray Lady can partially or totally revert to her true form as part of another action (such as an attack). As an action, she can appear fully human again.

Interaction: Although vicious and easily capable of murder, the Gray Ladies can be quite conversational if doing so suits their interests. They present themselves as serious, intelligent women of privilege, familiar with human comforts and technology (including driving an automobile). They can be bargained with, although such bargains are usually of the variety where they decide to spare someone's life if given exactly what they want. If there is more than one Gray Lady present, they tend to eerily finish each others' sentences.

Use: A Gray Lady arrives in town or at an event, showing a particular interest in a trinket some person has discovered.

Three Gray Ladies show up, claiming to be long-lost relatives or business associates of someone wealthy or important.

Loot: A Gray Lady carries a small amount of money for dealing with incidental things and might have a cypher or two, or perhaps even an artifact she intends to bring to her master.

Connection: A Gray Lady looks like someone a PC knew as a child. A Gray Lady claims to know or be related to a PC, whether or not there is any evidence that what she says is true.

GM Intrusions: The Gray Lady pushes or throws something heavy to block a door, either to prevent people from fleeing or to block reinforcements from arriving.

The Gray Lady's arms stretch impossibly and inhumanly far, striking at a character a short distance away, and the character's Speed defense roll against the attack is hindered.

HAINT TREE

5 (15)

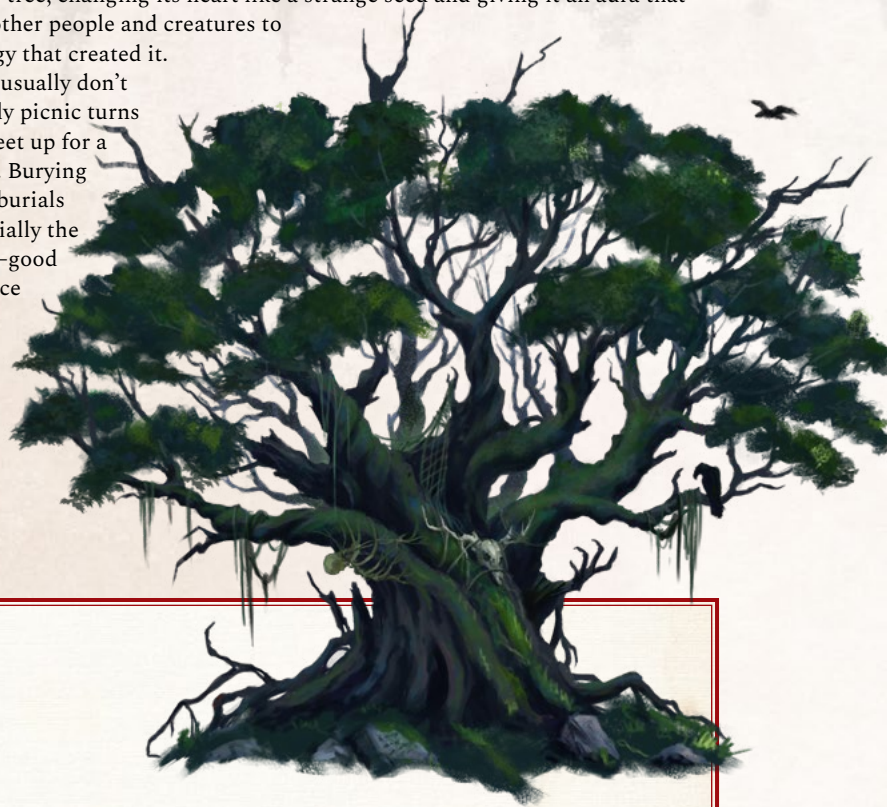
Haint trees grow more powerful over time—for a very old, very potent tree, increase its level and other stats proportionately to that change.

A creature sensitive to the supernatural world can usually feel the presence of a haint tree up to a very long distance away, although they'll have to search a bit to find the tree responsible for this sensation.

Wrongness, page 387

Haint trees were once normal trees, but over the years and decades of their lives, powerful events under, around, and beneath them imbued them with supernatural power. Emotions and incidental magic from weddings, murders, blood sacrifices, human and animal burials, funerals, hidden treasures, suicides, and marriage proposals seep into the tree, changing its heart like a strange seed and giving it an aura that perpetuates its power, drawing other people and creatures to provide it with more of the energy that created it.

Those affected by a haint tree usually don't know it's affecting them. A family picnic turns to arguments. Near-strangers meet up for a kiss and end up getting engaged. Burying one beloved pet leads to similar burials and remembrance offerings. Initially the tree attracts all kinds of energy—good or evil—but eventually the balance tips one way or the other, and thereafter the tree only draws things aligned with itself.



Belongs To: The Green, the Inner Dark, or something else

Motive: Gather and enhance emotional and magical energy

Environment: Woods

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 2 (0 against fire)

Movement: None

Modifications: Speed defense as level 3 due to size and immobility (see below); Might defense as level 6

Combat: Haint trees are immobile and can't easily make direct attacks against anything that would harm them. At best, once per round a tree might manage to drop a heavy limb on an attacker or cause them to trip over a root and hit their head. In addition to this attack, it can direct its power on one creature within long range, hindering their actions by three steps for as long as the tree maintains this focus.

Most haint trees are watched over by allied creatures (whether that's a group of animals, a concerned witch, or things from beneath the earth) and any attack on the tree quickly draws these creatures to protect it.

A haint tree enhances creatures and tasks that match its heart. For example, a tree aligned with the Green enhances healing, growth, and change, and one aligned with the Inner Dark intensifies murder, corruption, and defilement. Within long range of the tree, these creatures and tasks are eased, or by two steps within short range.

Interaction: A haint tree's awareness is simple and primitive; communicating with one feels like an empathic exchange of emotions. They recognize hearts that are similar to their own and are inclined to help them, and they oppose contrary energies and entities.

Use: A difficult curse-breaking ritual is likely to succeed only if done under the branches of a haint tree of the Green. A haint tree of the Inner Dark is the center of a blighted grove where sickness and pain take on physical form.

Loot: A root or branch from a haint tree—especially one given freely without killing the plant—can be a powerful token or crafting component for a cypher or artifact. Some of the tree's fruits or nuts might even be cyphers without needing any crafting.

Connection: A character's parents were married near a haint tree. Someone the character knew is buried under one.

GM Intrusions: An ally of the tree (such as a bear, a local witch, or a **wrongness** formed from bones buried nearby) appears and immediately threatens or attacks the character.

The character is overwhelmed by memories and emotions of past events projected by the tree, stunning them for a few rounds until they succeed at an Intellect defense roll.

HEXENWOLF

4 (12)

Lupine creatures covered in black fur with a pointed snout and long bushy tail, hexenwolves usually walk upright like a human, standing nearly 7 feet (2 m) tall, but they can run on all fours, with their limbs angled sideways from their shoulders and hips like a giant horrific spider. They howl like wolves, using these calls to coordinate their hunts. Along the fringes of human settlements, they attack livestock, stealing away chickens and other small animals or downing and devouring larger ones such as cattle.

Hexenwolves are nocturnal, hunting at night and sleeping during the day. Light doesn't harm them, but they dislike manmade lights such as street lamps and car headlights, and they might smash these things to allow themselves greater freedom to move about in the dark.

Hexenwolves never attack dogs or cats unless these creatures attack them first. Sometimes cats run along with or follow a pack of hexenwolves, taking bits of their kills, which the larger predators don't seem to mind.

*O Hunter's Moon
bringer of light and life
splitter of the night
we who walk these woods ask of you this
what wolf comes for us is turned back
what wolf comes for us is turned to stone
what wolf comes for us is shined bright
visible to all
let these words meet your light
let your light meet these beasts
let these beasts meet their ends
upon our blessed blades*

~Protection prayer against wolves

The wolflike creature known as dewayo or dwayyo is very similar to a hexenwolf and might actually be the same beast.

Some folks say that hexenwolves are naturally invisible but have to take a visible form when attacking. It's possible that this is true, but it's limited to rare hexenwolves who have a specialized gift.

Magical wards repel a hexenwolf, and painting a five-pointed star on a building is thought to keep them at bay, at least for a while.

Snallygaster, page 375

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Woods and mountains, alone or in packs of four to six

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short (see below); short when climbing

Modifications: Stealth as level 5 in natural environments

Combat: Hexenwolves make three attacks per turn, using two claws and a bite. A hexenwolf running on all fours can use its action to move a long distance and make one bite attack.

As part of another action, a hexenwolf can project its thoughts into one creature within short range that meets its gaze. The creature must succeed at an Intellect defense roll or be distracted by this mental intrusion, limiting their movement to an immediate distance each turn and hindering their Speed defense by two steps. If the hexenwolf does nothing else but use its dire gaze, the targeted creature's Intellect defense roll is hindered by two steps; if a pack is attacking, it's common for one of them to use its action this way while the rest of the pack tears the creature apart.

A hexenwolf can change the color of its fur to blend in with natural stone, earth, and plants, but this is ineffective around human-crafted materials and structures such as metal siding, wooden planks, and cement.

Interaction: Hexenwolves seem to have near-human intelligence, but they don't speak or acknowledge attempts to communicate with them. They are suspicious of food offered by humans (although they frequently scavenge human root cellars and other storage). Their natural enemies are *snallygasters*, and the two creatures fight to the death when they encounter each other; a victorious hexenwolf usually tears its defeated foe into bloody scraps and abandons these leavings for scavengers.

Use: Wolf howls ring out through the night, but tracks on the ground switch between bipedal like those of a human and prints that are too widely spaced for a wolf.

Connection: A character still bears the faded scar of a hexenwolf's attack from years ago. A character has a recurring nightmare of yellow eyes looking down on them from a wolflike face.

GM Intrusions: The hexenwolf exerts a dark force upon a character, cursing them (on a failed Intellect defense roll) with a strange scar-like mark and bad luck that hinders all tasks by two steps.

The hexenwolf makes a feint against the character, allowing a hidden ally to reveal itself and attack, inflicting an additional 4 points of damage.



HOLLOW MAN

5 (15)



By light of day, and under control of their masters, well, the Hollow Men were precise killers, cleaners, enforcers, and foot soldiers—but if they traveled too far from home without a minder, or they slipped the leash entirely, there had been tornadoes known to do less damage.

—Season 2, Episode 23: A Bad Night for Hollow Men

Those Who Sleep Beneath,
page 189

E.P. Barrow, page 196

Barrow Mineral Resources,
page 195

*It's possible that there are other
people in the region who have
the ability to create Hollow
Men through some pact of
their own.*

Through dark pacts with **Those Who Sleep Beneath**, E.P. Barrow (of **Barrow Mineral Resources**) has the power to create Hollow Men—supernatural agents that he uses to enforce his will and protect his assets.

Hollow Men are people who have been emptied out, body and mind, and filled with a new power and a new darkness. By day, they look like normal people, usually dressed in dark clothing—work clothes, a business suit, or whatever their tasks require. Each has a set of unique abilities he can use at night, usually requiring him to assume a monstrous form specific to him.

Hollow Men are dead people, reanimated and sustained by evil power. Their hearts don't beat and their blood doesn't flow, but unlike a corpse they don't deteriorate. The farther they get from the Barrow home office, the more violent and dangerous they become, showing no restraint and no regard for property damage or lives lost.



Belongs To: The Inner Dark (Barrow family)

Motive: Serve the Barrows

Environment: Anywhere the Barrows need them to be

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Intellect defense and resisting wards as level 3; Might-based tasks as level 6

Combat: Hollow Men often use their brute strength in combat, either wielding melee weapons or just using their fists. Each can transform into a monstrous creature, granting them a set of additional abilities, such as one of the following.

Armored Juggernaut: Thickened body made of concrete and plaster, with glowing eyes and a crown of horns. Armor 3; inflicts 6 points of damage.

Beast-Man: Hairy and large, face resembles a pig. Bite inflicts 8 points of damage; able to swallow nearly half a human body in one bite.

Breathstealer: Mouth stretches impossibly wide, reinforced with rows of bones to hold it open, lined with serrated black teeth. As an action, he can draw the air from around a person within short range, inflicting damage, moving them one step down the damage track each round, and extinguishing any fires within immediate range of them. Can hurl two destructive blasts of wind each round, inflicting damage on solid or ghostly creatures.

Shadowbender: A humanoid shape of nightmarish writhing darkness. As an action, he can wrap shadows around himself to turn **invisible** and silent (stealth as level 6), lasting until he attacks or chooses to reveal himself. As an action, he can **animate the shadows** of up to about a dozen people within short range, commanding them to attack for one minute.

Smoke-razor: Nine feet (3 m) tall, body made of smoke and razors, with hand bones elongating into blades. As an action, he can inflict a slashing wound at short range as if striking the target. As an action, he can fully become smoke, allowing him to fly a short distance each round and pass through narrow spaces.

Hollow Men are supernatural creatures, and wards affect them as such. Although they don't have the gift, they do have the ability to recognize other creatures of the Inner Dark that are in a human shape.

A Hollow Man recovers from nonlethal injuries in just a day or two.

The farther a Hollow Man is from Barrow, the more likely he is to lose control and become a berserk thing, easing all physical tasks but hindering all mental tasks by four steps; this lasts until sunrise.

Interaction: Hollow Men have all of the memories and skills of their time as regular people. They are loyal to (and fearful of) the Barrows, and persuading one to betray the family is difficult (level 8 persuasion task). They might negotiate for something they want, usually through intimidation or promising not to harm someone.

Use: An unassuming bureaucrat from Barrow Mineral Resources has an unusually aggressive bodyguard or driver. One or two Hollow Men show up to deal with someone who has been making trouble for the Barrows.

Loot: Hollow Men don't have any particular proficiency with cyphers or artifacts, and usually rely on their powers, reputation, and money. One might carry an interesting object, whether it's needed for their mission or being transported to their bosses.

Connection: A character had an unpleasant interaction with this particular Hollow Man in the past. The character remembers the person from before they were turned into a Hollow Man.

GM Intrusions: The Hollow Man uses his great strength to destroy an obstacle or barrier, or (on a character's failed Might defense roll) a piece of equipment the character is using. The Hollow Man uses a supernatural ability in an unusual way or to augment an attack, easing his task by two steps.

Invisibility, page 145

Shadow creature: level 3;
Armor 3; semi-solid fist inflicts
4 points of damage; flies an
immediate distance each round

The Barrow family has people (such as Mr. Carlisle and Mr. Werden) who can calm, stabilize, or "ground" a Hollow Man at risk of going berserk, or soothe one that has lost control.

THE HOUNDS

6 (18)



Each limb was covered in eyes. Brown with bloodshot whites, green with scarlet blobs floating around the iris, milky white and sightless orbs that seemed to pant like open mouths, and a pair—scarlet—that smoldered and throbbed a sick blood-clot brown.

—Season 1, Episode 4.5: The Bad Death and Resurrection of Annie Messer

Massive, hairless, blue-skinned creatures with broad boar-like bodies, the Hounds act as servitors to more powerful entities. Their too-many limbs are covered in multihued eyes and end in thick, black retractable claws.

Each wolflike head has three eyes—two black and empty, and one a burning gold sun at the center of its forehead. Nightmarish tusks protrude from the undersides of their jaws. Their maws are full of bladed spires and hacked stones, and their long, forked tongues can snake and retract.

Low Thing, page 188

Belongs To: The Inner Dark (*Low Thing*)

Motive: Be a good servitor to and carry out the wishes of their Thing

Environment: Anywhere they are sent

Health: 18

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Movement: Long

Modifications: Stealth, surprise, and hunting as level 8

Combat: When it's useful for them, the Hounds attack from stealth and use surprise.

They typically attack in groups of two or three, using their forked tongues to pierce a foe up to a long distance away, inflicting 6 points of damage. They can also catch and whiplash a foe with their tongue, knocking them prone and stunning them for one round on a failed Might defense roll.

The Hounds can become immaterial, able to pass through solid objects whose levels are lower than their own. While immaterial, they take only 1 point of damage from mundane attacks, but they take full damage from magical, energy, and other nonmundane attacks.

Interaction: The Hounds are always unfriendly but tend to ignore anyone who isn't pertinent to their acts of servitude. They're even more likely to attack anyone who stands in the way of carrying out their duties.

Use: Characters might come upon someone being attacked by the Hounds and offer help (or not). The characters might inadvertently (or purposefully) draw the ire of a Thing, who will use the Hounds to exact revenge. Alternatively, characters who tie their fortunes to the Low Things might find they are given aid in the form of two or more Hounds.

Loot: Some say the Hounds' body parts, especially the teeth and eyes, can be crafted into potent magic items. However, a Hound's body stays material for only a round or two after its death, before disappearing in a blaze of light.

Connection: One or more of the characters has been dreaming of the Hounds but didn't realize it until this moment.

GM Intrusions: The Hounds howl in unison, creating such a mournful sound that everyone within long range who fails an Intellect defense roll takes 6 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor).

As one of the Hounds withdraws its tongue after an attack, it damages a nearby tree or building, causing it to fall.



J.T. FIELDS III

8 (24)

Things of the Inner Dark,
page 188

*For a time, Jack was trapped
in an old, aging body by
The Thing Whose Name
Sounds Like Horned Head
But Is Not (page 376), but
Glory Ann Boggs (page 248)
gruesomely undid that working,
freeing Jack to craft himself
a new, immortal body.*

*Jack sometimes uses the aliases
“Mr. J.T. Fields III” and “Jack
Fields.” In older times and by
other peoples, he was known by
many names, including Rabbit,
Sasi, Coyote, and Anansi.*

J.T. (sometimes called Jack) is old, far older than anything in this region, having lived here even before the *Things of the Inner Dark* were imprisoned. He was asked to be their jailer but refused that work and responsibility, preferring to live free and scheme and travel. He looks like a man with glossy black hair and a face marked by character rather than time, making it impossible to determine his age. He wears simple clothes and sometimes carries a burlap poke. He never puts on airs, presenting himself as a person of average means but with many connections.

Motive: Scheming, planning, getting away with things, surviving

Environment: Towns (usually owning a small business run by someone else) and the woods (usually camping or fishing)

Health: 24

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Persuasion and social interactions as level 9

Combat: Jack uses mundane attacks—such as an axe, a shovel, a club, or a pistol—against mundane threats. If confronted by a dangerous supernatural creature, he is more likely to offer it a bargain for his freedom or try to slip away stealthily than to stand and fight.

Jack can speak with animals and command them in limited ways, and this power extends to whatever people he owns through his many deals. He senses the presence of ghosts and entities of the Green and the Inner Dark. As part of another action, his hard glance can disarm a foe within short range, and when he travels he can cover more miles in a day than any man.

Jack's greatest power is his ability to bargain for things, even magical or impossible things. His long life has been a series of trades, tricks, and exchanges, from plots of land to the lives of future sons to an animal's spots or a promise to a Thing.

If Jack's body is killed, he can eventually create a new one for himself. It's likely that only a supernatural creature could truly destroy him.

Interaction: Jack is clever and tricky, always looking to make a deal where he ends up better off than he was before. His deals are binding for both parties, and he always pays his debts, but he often tries to find loopholes and shortcuts so his cost and effort are minimal. He doesn't like to take sides or accept responsibility.

Use: Mr. Fields is known to have connections to important people and is willing to make introductions for a favor. Jack wants something the character has and offers something interesting in trade for it.

Loot: Jack has many resources at his disposal, including cash, jobs, mundane goods, and supernatural items he's traded for in the past.

Connection: The character remembers Jack from a previous meeting, an earlier bargain, or a similar connection through someone in their family.

GM Intrusions: Jack says something confusing or distracting, befuddling the character for a moment and giving Jack the opportunity to slip away unseen.

A person who owes Jack a debt comes to his aid in a moment of need.



KUDZU MAN

6 (18)

A kudzu man is an elephant-sized animate cluster of kudzu leaves and vines, animated by the power of the Green. It has limited intelligence, much like that of a smart dog, but it can sense if a creature has a respectful connection with the natural world or if it profanes the earth and plants. A kudzu man's purpose is to obscure and tear down infractions against nature, reclaiming structures and land that have been despoiled by human hands or foul creatures. When not active, it collapses into a mass of kudzu that covers about an acre, but when roused it forms into a vaguely humanlike shape that can tower over a house.

Belongs To: The Green

Motive: Protect nature and elemental life

Environment: Anywhere plants can grow

Health: 20

Damage Inflicted: 6 points

Armor: 3

Movement: Short

Modifications: Speed defense as level 3
due to size; resists poison and fungus as
level 4; attacks plants and structures as level 7

Combat: A kudzu man attacks twice per round with its gigantic fists. A creature struck must also succeed at a Might defense roll or become entangled and grappled by the vines. A grappled creature is hindered by two steps and automatically takes 6 points of damage every round on the kudzu man's turn; they can attempt to escape once each turn as their action. As its action, a kudzu man can move a grappled creature from its arm into its chest, immediately crushing them for 12 points of damage; on later rounds, the trapped creature takes 12 points of damage every round on the kudzu man's turn. A kudzu man can hold only one creature in each fist and one in its chest.

Every few hours, a kudzu man can grow leaves and vines that cover a short distance in all directions, creating an area of difficult terrain. This foliage persists even if the kudzu man leaves the area.

Interaction: A kudzu man is focused and primal. It doesn't speak but seems to (at least sometimes) understand human speech, particularly if the speaker is wise in the ways of herbs or is a friend of the Green. Technically, it can't be negotiated with, but a person might be able to persuade it to leave the area or seek out a more appropriate target.

Use: Fleeing homesteaders talk of a "giant" that attacked their house, which is now being pulled down by a thick layer of kudzu. An ancient bear (or other significant animal) is slowly followed by a blanket of vines and leaves that creeps along its path.

Loot: To those who help it or who it can sense are friends of the Green, a kudzu man will offer a gift of its flowers, vines, and berries, which can be used to craft powerful cyphers. Anyone who attempts to take part of the kudzu man by force will find the items quickly lose their magic.

Connection: The kudzu man recognizes a PC who has an affinity for the Green and avoids attacking them or even pushes them out of harm's way.

GM Intrusions: Roots from the kudzu man spread underground and sprout up to a long distance away as a new, smaller kudzu man (level 3), which grows to full size over several days.

The kudzu man's vines wrap around a character's throat, choking them and preventing them from speaking. The character must succeed on a Might defense roll every round or move one step down the damage track.



Unlike blank-eyed men (such as the Six Men who serve Daughter Dooley) who mindlessly follow orders and do not speak, the lamp-eyed dead react with intelligence and can communicate.

Blank-eyed men, page 351

Most animals don't have an adverse reaction to the presence of lamp-eyed dead.

For example, a family's horse would calmly graze outside a house full of these things, as if unfazed by—or unable to perceive—the animated corpses.

Lamp-eyed dead might be found in places other than Barlo, but if so, they are likely called something else and created by a different set of Voices or by some other malicious creature entirely.

The lamp-eyed dead's ability to coordinate their attacks helps them deal with more dangerous foes, such as mid- or high-tier PCs who wouldn't be concerned with attacks by low-level creatures.

LAMP-EYED DEAD

3 (9)



Cletus looked down into the face of the only woman he had ever loved. Ruby's face, though the same ashen color as those of his children, was still as lovely as ever, though her neck was ringed in blackened bruises. But her eyes, once a clear green like peridot, now glowed with the same smoldering, dead orange light as their children's, and Cletus supposed that was fitting.

—Season 1, Episode 8: Homecoming

The Voices are insidious, malicious, and petty, more than willing to make lopsided bargains with people and gleefully betray their minions when a debt comes due. They are capable of animating dead bodies by filling them with their will, controlling them like a child's toys. These wretched corpses still bear the wounds that killed them; their skin is a pale ash-gray, and their eyes throb with a faint dead-orange glow. These lamp-eyed dead speak as they did in life, but the sounds are rough and dry, and their facial expressions are tainted by the inhuman glee of the Voices that move their reluctant flesh. When the Voices have no more need of these bodies, they withdraw their power and the corpses fall to the ground, inert.

Belongs To: The Inner Dark (the Voices)

Motive: Punish dealbreakers for the Voices

Environment: In and near Barlo, Kentucky, alone or in groups

Health: 12

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Speed defense as level 2

Combat: Lamp-eyed dead use whatever human weapons they are carrying. If unarmed, they strike with fists, nails, and teeth.

When five or more lamp-eyed dead are together, they can make a single attack roll against one target as a level 5 creature, inflicting 5 points of damage.

Because they've already been killed, lamp-eyed dead are hard to finish off. If an attack would reduce their health to 0, it does so only if the number rolled in the attack was an even number; otherwise, the lamp-eyed dead is reduced to 1 point of health instead. This might result in a dismembered, gruesomely damaged corpse that is still moving.

Lamp-eyed dead can see in the dark at short range. The glow of their eyes is visible in the dark up to long range (if the thing is facing the viewer) but is easily mistaken for fireflies.

Interaction: As extensions of the will of the Voices, lamp-eyed dead might give a "lost" follower one last chance to continue serving them. Otherwise, the Voices speak from their dead mouths, imitating the words these people used when alive, either to lure their victims closer or to taunt them with the horror of this transformation.

Use: A supposed murder scene turns dangerous when the corpses awaken and speak. People spot strange lights in the dark and familiar voices of people known to be dead.

Loot: The lamp-eyed dead have whatever items they were carrying when they were killed—clothing, a tool or small weapon, and perhaps a few coins or a bit of jewelry.

Connection: The character recognizes a lamp-eyed dead as someone they used to know and care about.

GM Intrusions: The sight of a familiar lamp-eyed dead is overwhelming, causing a character to fall to their knees and take no action for a round if they fail an Intellect defense roll.

A lamp-eyed dead's mannerisms are reminiscent of the person they were in life, hindering the character's actions against them by three steps for the remainder of the encounter.



NOT DEER

3 (9)

Deer are common in Appalachia, but every now and then someone sees a creature that they think is a deer—and then quickly realize it's something else entirely. Its eyes might face forward instead of to the sides, its mouth might be an elongated canine snout with jagged teeth, or it might have extra joints in its legs, or claws or hands instead of hooves. It might even stand on two legs. It shows no fear of humans and moves strangely, like a puppet, making odd clicking noises. Whatever the specifics of its form, this wrongness marks it as a “not deer,” and its presence is unnerving to any person who sees it.

Not deer are larger and faster than regular deer. They've been seen eating carrion, and although they aren't inherently aggressive, their lack of fear toward humans means that instead of fleeing, they might attack if approached or threatened.

Like deer, not deer are usually spotted at night, or in the early morning or evening when visibility is low. It may be that whatever makes not deer the unnatural things they are also makes them avoid daylight. They often travel with normal deer, which don't seem to realize there's anything amiss with their monstrous companion.

Not deer might be incidentally related to or created by The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not (page 376)—though perhaps not a conscious act on his part. It could be that malevolent energy left behind when he passes through an area can infect a normal deer and turn it into a not deer.

The Hounds, page 364

Belongs To: The Inner Dark

Motive: Hunger for plants and flesh

Environment: Woods and roads, alone or in herds (of their own kind or mixed with normal deer)

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Long

Modifications: Perception and stealth as level 4

Combat: A not deer attacks once per round with a bite, antlers, or hooves, depending on what features its body has.

Any creature within short range of a not deer must succeed at an Intellect defense task or be unnerved by its unnatural presence, hindering all of their actions for one minute. Deer and not deer are immune to this ability.

Interaction: Not deer are beasts, but they have no fear of humans, and perhaps no fear of other supernatural creatures. One or more not deer might calmly graze in the vicinity of a Thing such as a **Hound**—although there's no guarantee the not deer won't be attacked if the other creature is hungry or malicious.

Use: Travelers on a road spot a deer up ahead, but instead of running away, it acts strangely and makes disturbing clicking noises. Seeing a group of deer in the failing light is a momentary respite from the horrors of the world—until it becomes apparent that one of the animals is a not deer.

Connection: Someone in the character's family was supposedly changed into a not deer by a witch. The character heard about not deer from a reliable witness who saw one.

GM Intrusions: Another not deer, previously out of sight, charges a long distance and attacks, easing its attack and inflicting an additional 3 points of damage.

A not deer's strange behavior is suddenly terrifying, causing a character who fails an Intellect defense roll to lose their next turn or flee a long distance away.



THE RAILROAD MAN

7 (21)

This creature is also known as “the Man from the Railroad.” He might use various human names in his work, but it is certain that none of these are his real names.

The Railroad Man doesn’t age like a human; he has spent decades looking exactly the same.

“Railroad tasks” include tracking people traveling by rail and knowing the origins of people who did so.

The Railroad Man’s business card has only a simply monogrammed “R” with two sets of tracks crossed elegantly behind it.

Angular beast: level 3

Pool of blood: level 2; each round it restores health to the Railroad Man equal to its level

Hollow Men, page 362

Company scrip, page 118

The Railroad Man is a malevolent spirit, not a true creature of flesh and blood. He cannot be killed, but he can be banished or bound.

This mysterious creature looks like a tall, elegant man, with a touch of gray at his temples and in his thin beard, wearing an exquisitely tailored charcoal-colored suit. Those who see him often think at first glance that they know him. Despite his fancy clothes, he walks like a foreman, confident and at home in rain and mud, unperturbed by the noise of trains and tunnels and smelting steel.

Those who can truly see him—whether people using the sight, or supernatural things able to pierce the human-seeming veil around him—see him as a series of disturbing glimpses, mostly people marked or destroyed by the railroad, each an image of pain and loss and violation resulting from an incessant drive to expand the railroad.

The Railroad Man is not a creature of the Inner Dark, but he seems to serve (or be a manifestation of) the greed and power of the railroad itself.

Belongs To: Unknown (the railroad)

Motive: Expand the railroad no matter the cost

Environment: Anywhere he can exploit a situation to the railroad’s advantage

Health: 21

Damage Inflicted: 7 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Intimidation, persuasion, and railroad tasks as level 8

Combat: The Railroad Man is stronger than he looks, able to easily tear out a person’s throat with one hand.

If the Railroad Man persuades a person to do a job for him, he gives them one of his black-edged business cards. If they fail an Intellect defense roll, he can control them like puppets (the character can try to break free each hour) and transform them into misshapen **angular beasts** willing to die or kill for him.

As an action, he can create a **pool of his own blood** that follows him like a shadow. For every dozen or so of his minions’ lives he sacrifices by making them batter themselves against an obstacle (such as a ward), he reduces the obstacle’s level by 1 and increases the pool’s level by 1.

The Railroad Man is able to recognize other supernatural creatures pretending to be regular humans (such as **Hollow Men**).

Interaction: The Railroad Man is usually pleasant, assuming you have something he wants and are willing to bargain for it. When crossed or denied, he remains calm but his words are laced with threats and promises of retaliation.

Use: A well-dressed man from the railroad is looking for people to help him with a job. Someone needs to find a person or thing that is traveling by rail (or has done so recently).

Loot: The Railroad Man has any number of hidden pockets, inside which he usually carries 1d6 **company scrips** of differing denominations from a variety of companies, as well a single business card.

Connection: The character once owed the Railroad Man a debt for his help, but now they’re “even steven” (or perhaps, according to the Railroad Man, they actually are not). The character remembers seeing the Railroad Man a long time ago.

GM Intrusions: The Railroad Man’s attack inflicts a bleeding wound on the character, immediately moving them one step down the damage track and increasing the level of his pool of blood by 2.

The Railroad Man ignores the damage from an attack against him, using his wound to create a pool of blood with a level equal to the ignored damage.



RAW HEAD AND BLOODY BONES

3 (9)

Raw Head is a skinless human head, and Bloody Bones is a dancing skeleton covered in blood. Although they appear to be two separate creatures, they are actually two parts of one horrid thing. Easily dismissed as a bogeyman-like folktale meant to scare children, he is quite real, and although he prefers small prey (such as children), he is capable of killing a full-grown man and dragging the corpse back to his lair to be eaten. He smells like rotting meat and avoids daylight, preferring to sleep under a hollow tree or in a mine until night falls and he feels like hunting.

Bloody Bones can move and see despite not having muscles or eyes. Although Raw Head can slowly roll or even float on his own, when he needs to move in a hurry, he prefers to be carried by Bloody Bones or mounted on his neck like a complete skeleton.

Sometimes Raw Head is described as a head that has been skinned, and other times he is little more than a skull covered in blood. Likewise, Bloody Bones might be just a skeleton, or he might still have some bits of flesh on him. It's likely that there are many creatures like this, each having a slightly different appearance.

Belongs To: The Inner Dark

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Woods and mines

Health: 16

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 1

Movement: *Raw Head:* immediate when rolling or floating. *Bloody Bones:* short; short when climbing.

Modifications: Attacks and stealth as level 5

Combat: Raw Head bites once per round with his unusually long and sharp teeth, while Bloody Bones slashes with his clawlike fingers. He often divides his attacks among two or more targets, and he might throw his head to bite at a foe a short distance away while clawing at an adjacent opponent.

Although he exists as two separate physical forms, Raw Head and Bloody Bones is one creature, sharing the same health. He heals quickly if he can eat fresh meat, regaining 5 health from a meal the size of a human child and 10 health for a full-sized adult. He takes a few rounds to finish a meal regardless of its size.

Raw Head dislikes open conflict, preferring to sneak, ambush, and drag away solitary prey so he can eat it without being disturbed. He attacks groups of people only if he is desperate or starving, or has no other choice.

Interaction: Raw Head can talk as well as a human and might be willing to bargain if he isn't too hungry. In some stories, he is willing to perform simple magic in exchange for a service, but given his monstrous nature, these rewards are likely cursed in some way.

Use: Local children claim to have heard a monster prowling outside their house at night. A heavy trail of blood leads to the base of a hollow tree or an adit (mine entrance).

Loot: Raw Head and Bloody Bones always keeps little piles of bones and inedible items from his victims. A pile is likely to have some personal effects, 1d6 cypher materials, and a couple of dollars or company scrip. Rarely there might be a cypher.

Connection: The character lost a childhood friend or a relative to Raw Head. The character once found one of Raw Head's victims in a mine tunnel.

GM Intrusions: Bloody Bones performs an eerie dance, entrancing or terrifying all onlookers who fail an Intellect defense roll. Affected characters can attempt to break free every round.

Raw Head bites off a chunk of the character's flesh and swallows it, inflicting damage and immediately regaining 4 health.



Raw Head and Bloody Bones might have been buried deep under the earth originally until he was released from imprisonment by mining or blasting.

In some tales, Raw Head was once the hog pet of a wise granny. When a lazy hunter killed and butchered him, the granny used her magic to reanimate her dead pet to avenge himself on the hunter.

RED DOG

2 (6)

Red dogs are magical creatures vaguely resembling stocky mutts, with glowing red eyes and a thick coating of ash on their skin, like they've rolled in dust. They hunt, chase, and play like wild dogs and wolves, although their only vocalizations are the crackling and sputtering of a large fire.

Red dogs aren't what they appear to be. Their skin isn't covered in ash. Instead, a thin layer of ash surrounds and covers the scorched rocks that form their "bones" and give them a doglike shape. Most attacks against them harmlessly break through this outer crust, revealing a hollow space and its inner hard parts.

In the center of a red dog's body is a rough stone "heart" that glows like a hot coal. If the red dog is killed and this heart isn't taken away or destroyed, the beast tends to reform and continue whatever it was doing before.

Red dogs can appear anywhere there has been a large coal fire in red rock, and they have been seen eating coal, dry wood, and other burnable objects. However, they aren't quite alive, and even a well-fed red dog eventually goes cold and collapses into inert materials after a few weeks.

Motive: Hungers for coal, wood, and other solid fuel

Environment: In and near mines, in packs of five to ten

Health: 6

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short

Modifications: Perception as level 3

Combat: A red dog makes one bite attack; its jagged, rocky teeth inflict 2 points of damage plus 1 point of damage from heat.

A slain red dog reforms after it dies, taking between a few rounds and a few minutes to do so, returning with full health. The only way to prevent this is to use an action to seize the dead creature's stone heart (which inflicts 1 point of damage from fire each round it is touched or held) and either crush it or move it at least a short distance away from any nearby red dogs (throwing it is usually good enough).

Interaction: Red dogs are beasts and have a temperament similar to that of normal dogs. They can be befriended but never fully tamed (partly because they have short life spans), and they react viciously if harmed, mistreated, startled, or forced into a confusing situation.

Use: An infamous company man can call upon a pack of strange red dogs to deal with strikers. Red dogs have been preying on a remote farm, stealing cut wood instead of chickens or sheep.

Loot: Red dogs carry nothing of value, but the rocky heart of one can be used to craft magical cyphers having to do with fire.

Connection: The character once was lost in the woods until they followed a red dog that led them to an active mine with people. The character knew someone with old bite and burn scars that they claimed was from a vicious red dog.

GM Intrusions: Several slain red dogs near the character immediately reconstitute themselves and attack.

The red dog's "skin" splits open, creating a burst of choking smoke that hinders the adjacent character's actions for the rest of the combat.



SHUCK

2 (6)

A shuck is a strange, miserable creature with an affinity for maize, whether wild or cultivated. It looks like a gangly brown and green monkey-like beast covered in russet patches like a horrible rash, with a cluster of lumps in its eye sockets that resemble multicolored corn. It appears to be wearing a garment made of overlapping fibrous patches; the inner layers actually grow from its skin, and it plasters the outer ones to itself with a sticky paste it creates in its mouth.

Shucks have a bestial intelligence on par with wolves and raccoons. They can communicate with each other by rustling their palms and clothing, sounding like leaves in the wind or (if frightened) very loud crickets.

Motive: Curiosity, theft, hungers for nutritious food

Environment: Croplands and wooded areas

Health: 7

Damage Inflicted: 2 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short

Modifications: Stealth among plants as level 4

Combat: A shuck attacks once or twice per round with its sharp claws and needlelike teeth. Once every few days, a shuck can shed its “clothing” and the outer layers of its skin, leaving behind a **crude husk** of itself that lashes out for a few rounds before collapsing and dying. This remnant’s actions are purely reflexive, like a twitching tail dropped by a fleeing lizard, and the shuck does this only as a distraction to escape a powerful threat. The fleeing shuck has no Armor until a couple of days pass and it can grow and craft a new layer of protection.

Interaction: Shucks don’t have a true language, but some understand the meaning of a few human words, much like trained dogs. They can be bribed with shiny things, berries, and unusual foods with strong odors and flavors, but at best this convinces them to leave a place or person alone until they get hungry again or too curious.

Use: An abandoned farm’s corn patch is haunted by things that rustle and squeak. A campsite has been picked over by something that—according to the tracks they left— isn’t human. Faceted eyes glint out of the darkness, reflecting the campfire light.

Loot: A shuck might have a few coins or bright trinkets, perhaps even a minor piece of jewelry.

Connection: A character once “befriended” a young shuck, but got hurt when it grew too big and hungry to be a child’s plaything. A character lived in a place that shucks frequently stole from.

GM Intrusions: The shuck’s attack carries the russet fungus growing on its skin, infecting the character on a failed Might defense roll. The infected character develops a disfiguring itchy rash over the next few days, hindering interaction tasks and subtracting 1 from all their recovery rolls. The character can try to overcome the rash once each day with a hindered Might defense roll.

The shuck grabs at something interesting or shiny the character has, stealing it and running away if the character fails a Speed defense roll.

Shuck husk: level 1, attacks as level 2

A group of shucks is sometimes called a stalk.



SKIN TOM

4 (12)

Tom is also known as "Skint Tom."

Skin Tom has often been involved in the every-seven-years binding of the Dead Queen (page 354), in a ritual requiring three witches and three Things.

Those who see through Tom's disguise usually do so by noticing a cut under his jaw, or that his eyes don't match the person whose skin he's stolen.

If Skin Tom is killed, he later awakens, greatly diminished and half alive, condemned to skulk about in a weakened form. Only after a long time and many sacrificed lives can he regain his normal skinless shape.

Skin Tom was once a regular man from Tennessee, quite the charmer in his day, someone who had a way with women. When a jealous husband caught him and skinned him alive, Tom survived long enough to encounter a creature of the Inner Dark, who granted him immortality and the ability to wear other people's skin like clothing.

In his true form, Skin Tom is a skinless adult man, his eyes and teeth contrasting sharply with his exposed muscles, and he wears a heavy cloak and hood so as not to draw attention to himself. He lurks and stalks his chosen victim, killing them quickly and carefully removing their skin to use as a disguise as he walks among regular people. These skins begin to stink and rot after about a week (although he enjoys the winter months when each skin lasts a little longer), so he enjoys his deception while he can and moves on after murder and mayhem.

Belongs To: The Inner Dark (by pact)

Motive: Murder, mischief, wearing others' skin

Environment: Woods and towns, hiding in his true form or in plain sight wearing another's skin

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Melee attacks, Speed defense, and stealth as level 5; disguise as level 6 (when pretending to be someone by wearing their skin)

Combat: Tom doesn't have any unusual attacks, but he is very skilled with a knife, attacking twice per round.

Interaction: Skin Tom is charming and personable, especially when speaking to women and when he wants something.

However, he is a bloodthirsty killer and shouldn't be trusted if there's an opportunity for him to murder and steal human skins to wear.

Use: The characters need a Thing to participate in a ritual, and Tom is available for a price. A person is found killed and skinned, dead for days, even though people saw them walking and talking that very morning.

Loot: Tom changes identities often and has little use for material things; whatever valuables he's carrying probably belong to whoever's skin he's wearing. He might have a little cash or a bag of sweets.

Connection: A friend or relative of a character was killed or spared by Skin Tom. A character reminds Tom of a skin he enjoyed wearing years or decades ago.

GM Intrusions: Part of Tom's stolen skin tears open, revealing his true form underneath, horrifying the character and hindering their actions by two steps for several rounds.

Tom makes a sudden and unexpected attack (either attacking with surprise or making an additional swift attack) that is eased by two steps and inflicts an additional 4 points of damage.



SNALLYGASTER

3 (9)

A snallygaster is a hideous chimeric creature, mixing the features of a bird and reptile, with hard scales, a metallic beak lined with razor-sharp teeth, and wings and talons. Some are said to have octopus-like tentacles, either growing from its body or near its mouth, and it might have two eyes or just one in the center of its forehead like a cyclops. It screeches like a train whistle and silently swoops down to snatch small animals or stray children. **Larger specimens** have been known to carry off adult men, leaving behind corpses drained of blood—if the victim is ever found. A snallygaster usually sticks to a small territory for weeks or months, terrorizing local folk, before moving on to hunt in a new area.

Motive: Hunger for flesh and strong alcohol

Environment: Woods and mountains

Health: 10

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 2

Movement: Short; long when flying

Modifications: Attacks and stealth as level 5

Combat: A snallygaster attacks three times on its turn, using its toothy beak and two claws. A creature struck by a claw is grappled by the snallygaster unless they succeed at a Might or Speed defense task (hindered if the snallygaster hit them with two or more attacks that round). A grappled creature automatically takes claw damage every round, but can attempt to escape as part of their action.

A snallygaster that is grappling a creature might decide to fly away with its prey instead of remaining to fight.

If the carried-off creature escapes the grapple while the snallygaster is flying, they fall and take 1 point of ambient damage (ignores Armor) for every 10 feet (3 m) fallen.

Magical wards repel a snallygaster, and painting a seven-pointed star on a building repels them nearly as well as a true ward, although the effect lasts only as long as the paint is relatively intact. A few weeks in bad weather causes the star to lose its potency, but that's usually enough time for the creature to move on to another area.

Interaction: Snallygasters are beasts and can't be bargained with, although they can be distracted by offerings of fresh meat. Their natural enemies are **hexenwolves**, and the two creatures fight to the death when they encounter each other; a victorious snallygaster usually feasts on the flesh of its dead foe.

Use: Livestock has gone missing without a trace, but a strange screeching cry suggests a snallygaster is hunting. A corpse is found, its body completely drained of blood.

Connection: A character grew up on a farm that once suffered attacks from a snallygaster. A character remembers awakening to the sound of a locomotive whistle and finding the bloody remains of an animal.

GM Intrusions: The snallygaster screeches, deafening all creatures in short range for one round and causing one character to freeze in fear if they fail an Intellect defense roll.

The snallygaster's attack strikes deep, causing a bleeding wound. Each round on the snallygaster's turn, the character takes additional damage and must succeed at a Might defense roll or move one step down the damage track. Using an action to deal with the wound ends the bleeding.

"Snallygaster" is derived from the name "Schneller Geist," meaning "quick ghost" in German.

Large snallygaster: level 5, attacks as level 6; health 20; beak and two talon attacks inflict 6 points of damage each; flies a long distance each round

A snallygaster that has tentacles hinders its opponents' defense rolls to resist its grappling attack.



Hexenwolf, page 361

THE THING WHOSE NAME SOUNDS LIKE HORNED HEAD BUT IS NOT

10 (30)



The woods stirred. The sound of something large came to her from deep within the wood. Louder and louder it grew until the largest buck she'd ever seen pushed out of the trees. Its coat was black as soot. Its hooves were wet with a viscous smearing brown. Its eyes burned with a foul blood-colored light. But the things she could not look away from were its antlers. They were amber. Translucent and honey-colored, pulsing with a low poisonous smolder, bits of ash falling from them here and there. It came to the edge of her boundary and reared and snorted, its wet hooves snappin' against the invisible barrier, and after a moment it settled and met her eyes evenly.

Witch Queen, page 384

—Season 1, Episode 0.5: The Witch Queen

The Beast. The Black Stag. The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not. The Lord of the Night and the Forest Day. The Betrayer. The Black Judas. The Maker of the Poisoned Promise. Old Horny. The Uncast Shadow. The Liar Saint. Whatever name he uses among lesser beings, he is a creature to be respected, feared, and avoided. He is a Thing of the Inner Dark; old, but not the oldest, though possibly the cruelest and most petty. He seems to delight in sowing distrust or destruction. He is powerful, but he is also beholden to even more powerful Things, ones that remain trapped, and he acts as their eyes and hands in the human world. To mortal creatures, he is nearly godlike in power, but compared to his masters he is but an insect. His task is to find humans with powers and turn them to the service of the Inner Dark. He can speak telepathically (in a monstrous, disorienting mental voice) with any creature and project a physical voice to any location he chooses.



It is almost, but not, a hoofed mammal. It has far too many legs to be one of those, and those legs are many-jointed and insectoid and hold it in an unnatural crouch above its rapt congregation. Darkness streams from its body like ribbons of fabric that seem also to plaster it to the wall, covering it bit by bit, but still blowing free to reveal a hideous carcass of writhing bones that slither into unholy configurations and reshape themselves as if they were trying to get comfortable. Its head is once again the shape of an enormous stag, eyes the color of blood clots.

—The Holiest Days of Bone and Shadow, Chapter Three:
Something Old, Something New

Belongs To: The Inner Dark

Motive: Corrupting and turning mortals, advancing the goals of his patrons

Environment: Anywhere

Health: 80

Damage Inflicted: 10 points

Armor: 4

Movement: Long; short when climbing

Combat: The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not can attack twice per round with his hooves or antlers. He prefers drawing upon his innate magic, using any one of the following abilities as an action, up to long range.

- Create a blast of fire, inflicting 16 points of damage on a single target, or 8 points if his target succeeds at a Speed defense roll.
- Create poisonous black smoke, inflicting 10 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) on a creature on a failed Might defense roll, and another 5 points every round until the creature succeeds at a Might defense roll.
- Create bitter cold, freezing a target in place and inflicting 10 points of damage on a failed Might defense roll. A frozen creature can't move away and their Speed defense tasks are hindered by two steps; they can attempt to break free each turn with a Might-based task.
- Attack the mind and soul of a creature, inflicting 8 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) on a failed Intellect defense roll and moving them one step down the damage track on a failed Might defense roll. If either of these effects kills the creature, it automatically revives the next round as a **blank-eyed man** under The Thing's control.
- Every few rounds, The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not can attack every creature in a short area with one of his magical abilities, but the attack is hindered by three steps.
- Create an illusion of one or more people (alive or dead), with the ability to talk and interact as if they were separate creatures (but without the original creature's memories or knowledge).

The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not recovers 5 health every round. He is immune to poison and disease. It might be impossible for any human (no matter how powerful) to kill him, and if so, then defeating him is more about containment and banishing than truly putting an end to him.

Interaction: The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not loves to talk, for it gives him opportunities to sway, convince, fool, and deceive mortals. Those speaking with him should be very careful about what they say and/or agree to, just in case they fall into a subtle pact with him that includes strings he'll play when the time is right. He is contemptuous and hateful, and wrathful when disobeyed, harmed, or thwarted.

Use: The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not is the most horrific, dangerous, and unknowable creature active in Appalachia. Unless a character has powerful magic on their side (including in-place wards where a confrontation with the creature is about to take place), battling him with wits or weapons is incredibly unwise. Most regular people flee or go mad as soon as they see him.

Loot: If The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not is defeated, parts of his body can be used as 1d6 + 4 cypher materials (especially for cyphers relating to corruption, harm, and transformation). Portions of him (particularly his antlers) can be used as materials for crafting artifacts.

Connection: The character or someone close to them has a pact with The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not. The character bears an item that they don't realize is a part of or a gift from The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not.

GM Intrusions: As part of another action, The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not destroys one or two of the character's cyphers if they fail an Intellect defense roll.

As part of another action, The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not creates an illusion of a dead person the character loved. The illusion confuses or distracts the character (hindering them by two steps) until they succeed at an Intellect defense roll.

*The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not has other dark magic at his disposal, such as making pacts with mortals in exchange for power, giving a creature immortality (at a price), granting a human dominion over a long area (easing their defenses by two steps when within it), creating monstrous creatures like the **Gray Ladies**, or similar horrible ideas the GM can use as story elements for the game campaign. Doing so usually requires a minute or more and therefore isn't something he tries during combat.*

Gray Ladies, page 358

Blank-eyed men, page 351

Artifacts made from the defeated creature's antlers include the jeweled comb (page 337) and the bone ring (page 334).

For most of the time period covered by the Old Gods of Appalachia podcast, the entity commonly known as Horned Head is greatly diminished after losing a battle with the Witch Queen, in which his antlered crown was broken. His stats here represent him in a weakened state (but not so weak as when he had to take a near-human form). At his full power, his level and all of his stats are 2 higher than what is shown here.

TOMMYKNOCKER

2 (6)

Miners' tales of tommyknockers say they are helpful beings who warn people when a mine shaft is about to collapse. Wise miners leave food out for them and never look for them, for tommyknockers react violently when seen and don't like to be followed. A tommyknocker is about 2 feet (60 cm) tall, with a big head, long arms, a wrinkled face, and white whiskers, carrying small tools and wearing what resembles a miner's work clothes.

Tommyknockers use their tools to make quiet knocking and thumping noises on the stone walls where they live, conveying simple messages to each other through long-reaching echoes. If they sense that an area is about to have a cave-in, they knock loudly to warn each other and other creatures in the area.

They craft their own tools and clothes out of things they find or steal. A glimpse of one might resemble a child working in the mine, but a better look at the creature's odd, wrinkled face makes it clear they aren't human at all.

Tommyknockers hate whistling and the talk or music from radios. It's common for all tommyknockers to leave a mine within a dozen days of this noise, leaving the workers vulnerable to unsafe tunnels—and other strange things that live in the deeps.

It's likely that tommyknockers used to be more benign creatures that were slowly corrupted by the Inner Dark with a madness that makes them unpredictable. Now they switch between helping and stealing, and attacking those who follow or watch them.



Motive: Helping miners and cave-dwellers, stealing

Environment: Caves and mines, alone or in groups of up to five

Health: 6

Damage Inflicted: 2 points

Movement: Short; short when traveling as mist

Modifications: Stealth and working with stone as level 5

Combat: A tommyknocker attacks with a small tool such as a hammer, mining pick, or knife. It usually flees after a round or two. As an action, a tommyknocker can turn into mist or flickering candlelight for a few moments, moving up to a short distance even through the tiniest cracks in the rock. They use this ability to escape pursuers and to guide rescuers to humans trapped by a cave-in.

Interaction: Tommyknockers never speak, but they understand gestures and some human words. They're more likely to be harmless if little bribes are left out for them and if nobody tries to look for them—communicating in the dark or around a corner is the safest option.

Use: Repetitive noises in a new tunnel branch signal an upcoming collapse. Tommyknockers are blamed for food and equipment going missing in a mine.

Loot: A tommyknocker might have an interesting small treasure stolen from a miner, such as a keepsake locket, a pocket watch, or scrip.

Connection: Most characters who are familiar with mining know of the tommyknockers and probably have heard them tapping.

GM Intrusions: The tommyknocker tries to hobble the character, reducing their movement to an immediate distance on a failed Might defense roll. (A one-hour or ten-hour recovery ends this.)

The tommyknocker's face changes to that of a person who died in the mine, startling and hindering the character for a few rounds on a failed Intellect defense roll.

WAMPUS

5 (15)

Wampus (also known as wampus cats) are feline beasts about the size of a tiger, roughly 4 feet (1 m) high at the shoulder and 9 feet (2.5 m) long. They have fierce yellow or green eyes, and black or dull silver fur that is nearly as thick and stiff as a porcupine's quills. They are nocturnal and equally at home on land, in the trees, or in shallow water. They usually subsist on small prey but prefer larger, heartier meals like deer, cows, and horses, taking them down quickly with strikes to the neck. Although a wampus moves on all four paws, it sometimes crouches, sits, or even stands like a humanoid, leading some folk to believe it's a human shapechanger.

Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Woods, swamps, lakes, and rivers

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Short; short when swimming

Modifications: Attacks, climbing, and jumping as level 6; stealth as level 3 within short range due to stench

Combat: A wampus attacks with a bite and one of its claws. It can move a short distance and make one attack on the same turn, even moving vertically (they're known to hunt large birds, such as eagles, this way). It can walk on its hind legs for a few rounds, reducing its movement to an immediate distance but allowing it to bite and claw twice as its attack.

Once every few minutes, a wampus can emit a horrifying scream. All creatures within long distance must succeed at an Intellect defense roll or be hindered for one minute. Any creature that fails two of these Intellect defense rolls within one hour is hindered until they take a ten-hour rest.

A wampus's foul odor means it's easy for creatures within short range to notice their presence. The wampus seems to be aware of this and always remains farther away until it's ready to attack.

A wampus can see in dim light as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light.

Interaction: A wampus has beast-level intelligence but is clever enough to stalk, harry, and ambush its prey. It might follow a creature or circle a campsite for a while, occasionally using its frightening howl to unnerve its quarry before striking.

Use: The area around a half-eaten sheep smells like a skunk and is surrounded by paw prints that don't lead anywhere. Camping characters hear eerie yowling in the darkness and sometimes spot a pair of glowing eyes.

Loot: The hide, fangs, claws, and bones of a wampus can be used as 1d6 cypher materials.

Connection: The character has a family member who claims they once escaped a wampus when out in the woods after dark. A family heirloom includes a carved wampus claw.

GM Intrusions: The wampus howls as part of its attack, forcing one foe to flee in terror for a minute on a failed Intellect defense roll. The wampus's attack strikes a major blood vessel, inflicting 5 points of bleeding damage every round until the character receives healing or uses an action or two to stanch the wound.

Some witness accounts of a wampus describe it as having a few doglike features. These creatures might have variant forms, or perhaps the person mistook a different beast, such as a hexenwolf (page 361) or white thing (page 381), for a wampus.

Some wampus have six legs instead of four. They can move a long distance as their turn and still make one attack, or move a short distance as their turn and make two attacks.



WATER HORSE

5 (15)

Water horses breathe water or air.

Being in deep water hinders a character's attacks by one or two steps (see page 145); aquatic creatures like the water horse ignore this penalty.

There are many things to be afraid of in the creeks, rivers, and lakes of Appalachia, but perhaps none so much as a water horse. Its sea-serpent body is 20 feet (6 m) long and has too many fins, too many tails, and perhaps even too many eyes, but it's hard to know, because almost no one sees the entirety of it at once. Some days it's the color of mud half-dried along the bank. Others it's the blue-green of sunlit algae. And some it's darker than the shadow you cast upon the water below you when you lean over to look. Or perhaps it's so big and has so many parts that it's all of these and more.

Although water horses prefer to hunt fish, frogs, and similar creatures, or scavenge remnants from riverbeds, they've been known to bite dogs, sheep, and humans that venture into their territory and pull such creatures underwater if they taste good. Due to their large size, water horses quickly deplete the available food in one area and have to move to a new location every few days.

Water horses are excellent swimmers but can scoot about on land when they need to, including spending a full day or two crawling to get around an obstacle.



Motive: Hungers for flesh

Environment: Lakes, rivers, creeks, and ponds, alone or in groups of up to three

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Immediate on land; short when swimming (see below)

Modifications: Speed defense as level 3 due to large size

Combat: A water horse bites once each turn, inflicting damage and firmly holding their target if the creature fails a Might defense roll. A held creature's Speed defense is hindered, and they automatically take damage at the start of the water horse's turn every round until they break free with a Might- or Speed-based roll. If the attack happens in water, the water horse also swims deeper (moving up to its swimming speed) and wraps its coils around its prey, crushing the air out of them; each round, the grabbed creature must succeed at a Might defense roll or move one step down the damage track due to constriction and suffocation.

About once an hour, a water horse can swim up to a long distance as its action and still make a bite attack. It can reach up to 10 feet (3 m) out of the water, easily plucking someone out of a boat, off a low bridge, or from a campsite near the water line, then dragging its prey back into the water as soon as possible.

Interaction: Water horses are beasts, but they have a strange cunning and sometimes act like they understand human language and behavior. If offered fresh meat (several game birds, a sheep, or a dog), they are likely to snatch the food away and retreat for an hour to eat and digest the meal.

Use: Livestock have gone missing along a deep stream. Something stirs underneath a wooden bridge.

Loot: Water horse teeth and bones might be useful in some kinds of crafting.

Connection: The character grew up hearing stories of a lake monster that would snatch up careless children. The character has a knife or piece of jewelry made from a water horse's tooth.

GM Intrusions: Another water horse appears and bites at a character—preferably one already held by a water horse (easing this attack).

WHITE THING

6 (18)

This creature, also known as a devil dog, is covered in long, shaggy hair, matted and unkempt. Its head is somewhat doglike, with glowing red or yellow eyes, and has been seen with or without goat or ram horns. Its body has been variously described as being like a bear, large dog, cow, wolf, or huge badger. It smells like rotten eggs, and when it detects possible prey, it's known to release an unnerving scream that sounds almost human.

White things are bloodthirsty and aggressive, attacking without provocation. However, although the wounds from their bite and claws feel real, those who survive an attack by a devil dog are surprised to find they have no physical marks from it. Despite this strange quirk, a white thing is quite capable of killing and leaves behind mutilated, bloodless corpses.

Motive: Inspire fear, hungers for blood

Environment: Isolated woods, roads, and cemeteries

Health: 18

Damage Inflicted: 4 points

Armor: 1

Movement: Long (see below)

Modifications: Attacking from surprise as level 7

Combat: A white thing attacks three times per round, once with its bite and twice with its front claws, inflicting **Intellect damage**. These attacks leave no physical wounds on its target—the character vividly feels the pain and shock of the assault, but when the fight is over, they realize they are physically unharmed.

Despite this, any creature killed by a white thing immediately gains physical cuts and punctures where the beast struck them, as if the psychic shock of its claws and teeth finally manifests in their flesh. When the white thing feeds on a dead foe, it sucks out all of its prey's blood and laps up every last drop that was spilled, leaving behind a drained corpse with no blood in the vicinity.

A white thing normally moves up to a long distance each round, but when chasing something fast—such as a horse, car, or train—it can fly and **keep up with its target** for a few rounds before returning to the ground and its normal speed.

Interaction: Devil dogs are aggressive beasts and can't be reasoned or bargained with.

Use: A family reports hearing strange screams in the woods, followed by finding bloodless, mutilated corpses of their domesticated animals. A white, furry mass charges out of the shadows at a traveler.

Connection: The character knew someone who saw a white thing at a cemetery, and within a few days they were dead (supposedly from some other cause). The character survived an attack from a white thing when they were younger, although at the time they thought it was just a nightmare.

GM Intrusions: The character is very sensitive to the white thing's stench, hindering their actions by two steps when within immediate range of it and by one step when within short range.

The white thing screams, unnerving the character for an hour on a failed Intellect defense roll, hindering their actions for that time.

In some tales, a white thing or devil dog is said to run on two legs. In others, it seems to have six legs instead of four.

Unlike most attacks that inflict Intellect damage, damage from a white thing does not ignore Armor.

A typical train or racing horse might reach 40 or 50 miles (65 to 80 km) per hour.



WITCH

5 (15)



And as there are legends of the elder sister in the plateau, the stories of the witchy woman in the woods, the ghost mother, the vengeful bride that looks in your winder for her baby abound across all of Appalachia. Amongst the eastern band of the Cherokee she might be mistaken for one of the Raven Mockers, twisted witches that lay in the way of darkness, prepared to steal away the livers and lives of the sick and the dying. Why, over in Pikeville, Kentucky, they might tell you she's Miss Octavia Hatcher who was buried alive and haunts the land her body sleeps in, hands all bloody from raking at the inside of her casket. In the Cumberland Gap they'd warn you of the pale and hungry mother who wanders the hills like an old blind wolf and would eat you right up with all her mouths if you went too far into the wrong woods. These yarns were spun to teach you to stay safe and mind common sense and most importantly your mama. The stories that get lost, though, the ones hardly nobody ever lived to tell, were often just blunt and simple warnings: There is darkness here. Fear it. Trust those who can see through it and you might live to see the dawn. Or then again, maybe not.

—Season 2, Episode 12: The Other Queen

It's important to distinguish witches from grannies. A granny is a woman who knows helpful folk magic, and although she could be dangerous if crossed, she's not generally harmful to regular folks. A witch, on the other hand, is a malign entity, usually a threat, but someone who can use her powers for good if the mood suits her and she is paid or persuaded to help.

Witches are crafty magical people best left alone or avoided, and only desperate or evil folk truck with them. Most witches are dangerous and ruthless, some have given themselves over to the Inner Dark, and a rare few are truly monsters—or even reanimated dead—who exist only to bring misery and ruin to others. A witch might look like a normal person, be mildly afflicted by corruption, or have a hideous true form hidden by a magical disguise of seeming normalcy.



Belongs To: None, or the Inner Dark

Motive: Domination of others, acquiring knowledge and power

Environment: Woods and hills

Health: 21

Damage Inflicted: 5 points

Movement: Short

Modifications: Deception and magical knowledge as level 6

Combat: A witch can attack with a knife or similar weapon; some of the more monstrous ones might bite or use their jagged fingernails. However, a witch is more likely to use one of her magical abilities in combat, such as the following:

Charm: Creatures within short range who fail an Intellect defense roll are under her control for one minute. Affected creatures turn on their allies or take some other action described by the witch. They can attempt a new defense roll each round, but each failure hinders their next attempt.

Glamour: Glamour is an illusion that the witch creates. It might let them look like someone else, appear to be a tree or a bird, or make them invisible. Seeing through the glamour is a level 8 Intellect task. A failed attempt inflicts 2 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). Once a character sees through the glamour, they cannot unsee it.

Mind Shriek: A creature within long range is afflicted with painful thoughts and memories, inflicting 3 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor) on a failed Intellect defense roll.

Scratch: A creature within long range is slashed by shadowy forms, thorny vines, or some other unnatural source, taking 5 points of damage.

Shrivel: A creature within long range and two creatures adjacent to them take 3 points of Speed damage (ignores Armor) on a failed Might defense roll. Affected creatures take damage each following round until they succeed at a Might defense roll.

Vitality: The witch regains 11 points of health and gains +3 to Armor for one minute. (Multiple uses of this ability don't improve her Armor.) To use this power, some witches must pull health from another living being in long range, which deals them 2 points of damage.

Ward: The witch spends one hour placing protective magic in a long area, hindering actions against her for one day.

Interaction: Most witches are deceptive and conniving, though some just want to be left alone. All witches are willing to negotiate, though the devious ones usually do so in bad faith—unless compelled to honor their bargains.

Use: A dangerous witch is the only person who knows a binding ritual that the characters need. A witch inflicts suffering upon a family whose long-dead patriarch wronged her decades ago.

Loot: A witch usually has several cyphers, such as any kind of **apple head doll** or **conjure card**, and perhaps an artifact such as a **memory jar**.

Connection: The character's parents once got help from the witch, but the price was too high. The witch has a feud with the character's family.

GM Intrusions: The witch immediately makes another mind shriek, scratch, or shrivel attack, even if she's already attacked this turn.

An ally or minion of the witch was hiding nearby and strikes the character with surprise, easing their attack and inflicting 5 points of damage.

These statistics are for a typical witch. The GM can make a weaker or stronger witch by adjusting these numbers up or down by one or two levels, especially for multiple witches working together. For example, a level 5 witch might have two level 3 witch students.

There are witches who serve the Green, but it's unlikely that they will end up in combat against the player characters. These witches have similar statistics, but their powers usually focus on healing and protection.

Common actions for a charmed creature are attacking the witch's foes, leaving the area, or sitting quietly.

Witches often have one or two other magical abilities, such as transforming into or summoning animals, conjuring diseases or poisons, cursing people so their wounds can't heal, binding supernatural entities, and sacrificing living creatures to temporarily augment other magic.

Apple head doll, page 315

Conjure card, page 318

Memory jar, page 338

THE WITCH QUEEN

8 (24)



Her part of the woods smells of the rotten cucumber of copperheads, and the air carries the sound of bears poppin' jaws and every other warning that these woods are not safe. Hanging food from a tree branch will not save it nor you if you are foolish enough to try to camp here! Both will be scented, found, and taken. She watches you here. She is snake bite and mauled bodies. She has never known death and probably never will! Yours will only feed her and make her even younger and full of sap. She is not to be stopped, and we call her the Witch Queen.

—Season 1, Episode 0.5: The Witch Queen

The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not, page 376

The Witch Queen is sometimes accompanied by Bartholomew, a bearlike creature of the Green who can also take the form of a well-dressed, broadly built Black man, or vanish completely by transforming into natural earth and foliage.

Bartholomew: level 6; health 25; Armor 3; two claws and a bite each inflict 6 points of damage

For a long time, the Witch Queen was served by six blank-eyed men (page 351), a “gift” of The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not, and she could telepathically call them to her at a distance of many miles.

The child of two skilled witches, the woman once known as Daughter Dooley inherited a powerful talent, and has had many decades to practice and perfect her abilities. She appears to be a woman of about twenty years, with russet-colored hair, eyes like flint, and a look of fierce nobility in her face; however she does not age and is much older than she looks, having been born in 1756. Solitude suits her; she lives in a remote home in the woods, alert for intruders and the lost but preferring to remain apart from most human folk lest she accidentally harm them with her curse. Although she serves the Green (and perhaps is its most powerful human agent in this time period), she has a dark link with *The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not*, and its influence on her sometimes makes her hesitant to intervene for fear of accidentally doing something that aids the Inner Dark.



Belongs To: The Green (has a pact with The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not)

Motive: Helping sick people, fighting The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not

Environment: Anywhere in the woods, especially near her home

Health: 30

Damage Inflicted: 8 points

Armor: 1 (2 against cold, immune to fire)

Movement: Short

Modifications: Uses and defends against magic as level 9

Combat: As part of another action, the Witch Queen can change her shape into something dangerous with teeth and nails, though she mainly uses this to scare off ignorant people who'd seek to harm or take from her. Against supernatural opponents, she calls upon powers of the Green for such feats as summoning wind and rain to quench fire, briefly transforming fistfuls of leaves into swarms of birds that fight on her behalf, and binding foes with vines and saplings.

She is an expert at magic, able to heal wounds, ease pain, ensure healthy and safe childbirth, and create powerful wards. Some of her magic requires (or is eased by using) cyphers or implements like herbs, ointments, and nails, but her power and skill are such that even without these things she is a formidable ally or opponent.

Her youth and vigor are sustained by her pact with The Thing Whose Name Sounds Like Horned Head But Is Not, which automatically draws upon the lives of people around her.

Within a short distance of the Witch Queen, tasks to avoid moving down the damage track or dying from injury or illness are hindered by two steps.

Interaction: The Witch Queen is used to being alone, but it's in her nature to want to heal people, and she is likely to intervene if she can do so without causing additional harm. As a powerful witch, she has immense knowledge and will share it when needed. Those with the gift can sense the touch of the Inner Dark upon her, and she understands their mistrust.

Use: An injured character's life is saved by the unexpected (and brief) arrival of the Witch Queen. The characters need advice or an answer about something regarding the Green and the Inner Dark, leading them to seek out the Witch Queen.

Loot: In addition to the cyphers and other witching implements she owns (most of which she made), Daughter Dooley has inherited books of lore and jewelry from her mothers, and she has an impressive stash of useful herbs for her workings.

Connection: A wise character learned a charm from someone who learned it from the Witch Queen. A character bears a token that once belonged to the Witch Queen.

GM Intrusions: The Witch Queen activates a ward, blocking all attacks against her for several rounds.

A powerful ally arrives to help the Witch Queen.

The Witch Queen's curse drains life from a character, inflicting 10 points of damage (ignores Armor) on a failed Might defense roll (or just 5 on a successful one); she recovers health equal to the damage inflicted.

The Witch Queen's curse-pact doesn't affect defense rolls to avoid regular attacks, such as Speed defense rolls against gunfire, but it does affect Might defense rolls against poison and disease.

WOLF SISTER

5 (15)



Like most people, a wolf sister is susceptible to the corruption of the Inner Dark—filling her mind with poison and her heart with bloodlust and vengeance, until she is a thing of hatred and violence.

Lesser wolf sister: level 2 in human form, all tasks as level 3 in wolf form; health 10; wolf bite inflicts 4 points of damage

A wolf sister's transformation doesn't include clothing or equipment, so they usually remove these things before they use their salve and transform. Otherwise, the change would ruin their clothes.

Unlike mythological werewolves, wolf sisters don't heal any faster than a human, but they can use their gift to tend any wounds they suffer while hunting.

What stared back at them was almost a woman. She looked clearly dead, or at least unliving. Her face was smooth and pale in the light. Part woman, part wolf in shape, as if caught halfway between transformation. Her throat was a halo of bruises in the shape of a man's hands; below her collarbones, though, her body was lean and furred with a sandy reddish coat and she was naked. At her feet lay a wolfskin and a pot of rancid rendered fat.

"Oh, sisters . . ." the wolf-thing began, seemingly fighting back teeth that wanted to erupt through her gums. "It's so much worse than you can imagine."

—A Once-Told Tale: The Wolf Sisters Part Two

Some women with the gift can use it to call upon the blood song, cracking their bones and twisting their human flesh until what emerges from their body is more wolf than human. These wolf sisters are not cursed victims like in the stories from the old country, nor do they make others into wolf shapes with their bite. They keep their human minds even as they take on a wolf's form, and when on two legs they have enough granny lore to heal the sick and make wards around their homes. During the day they help women in need, and under the shadows of night they hunt.

Motive: Protect women, hunger for flesh and vengeance

Environment: Homes in remote parts of the woods, usually in packs of three or more

Health: 26

Damage Inflicted: 5 or 8 points

Movement: Short; long when in wolf form

Modifications: Speed defense and perception as level 7 when in wolf form

Combat: In human form, a wolf sister uses human weapons, inflicting 5 points of damage. In wolf form, she attacks with a vicious bite or claw, inflicting 8 points of damage.

A wolf sister can use her action to noisily transform into a wolf or back into her human shape. To use this ability, she must first cover her skin with a special salve of rendered fat, which usually lasts for an entire night, allowing her to change shape at will during this time.

Some wolf sisters have only a weak gift and need a more powerful sister to prepare their salve, and that sister must be within very long range for them to transform. These **lesser wolf sisters** follow the commands of the more powerful members of the pack.

As a person with the gift, a wolf sister can sense the general presence of her own kind and other gifted folk within long range.

A wolf sister can be repelled, bound, and banished like a supernatural creature of the Green or the Inner Dark.

Interaction: Wolf sisters are sympathetic to women in need, especially those who have been harmed or betrayed by men. They tend to be distrustful of men, especially men of power and privilege who think they can harm women without suffering any consequences. Once a wolf sister has taken wolf form, she's more interested in hunting than talking.

Use: A series of grisly animal attacks has killed several company men. A pregnant woman seeks the wolf sisters for protection against her former lover.

Loot: If a wolf sister is defeated, portions of her body can be used as 1d6 + 1 cypher materials (especially for cyphers relating to healing, protection, and perception).

Connection: The character knows someone who was helped (or harmed) by a pack of wolf sisters, or is related to one of them.

GM Intrusions: The wolf sisters work a binding, preventing a character from moving more than an immediate distance for a few rounds.

The wolf sister's attack is especially vicious, inflicting damage and also moving the character one step down the damage track on a failed Might defense roll.



WRONGNESS

2 (6)

A wrongness is an unnatural thing that only vaguely resembles an animal, as if a small monstrous thing was playing at an animal's shape. Its features are obscured by a thick layer of dark powder very much like coal dust that absorbs most light that touches it. In the rare times it's found in bright sunlight, a wrongness looks like a coal-black, lumpy, misshapen parody of a natural creature, its limbs disproportionate, its joints bending the wrong way, and its body combining aspects of emaciation, bloat, and deformity. In areas of lesser illumination, it's merely a dark shape, a shadow blacker than midnight, that gives the impression of being put together incorrectly and slowly sliding into new configurations.

Motive: Defending its territory, causing fear

Environment: Mines and near woods with mines, solo or in groups of up to ten

Health: 6

Damage Inflicted: 3 points

Movement: Short; short when climbing

Modifications: Speed defense as level 3 due to size; melee attacks as level 3; perception and stealth as level 4

Combat: A wrongness attacks once per round according to its current shape, typically with a part of its body that looks like a mouth or claw. In addition to normal damage, the attack coats that part of the target's body in harmless coal dust.

A wrongness's shape is somewhat fluid, and they can easily squeeze through spaces that would confine a creature half their size, including between picket fence posts, the spokes of wagon wheels, or metal bars. When a wrongness uses this ability, it often has a different shape when it comes out the other side, as if it forgot what it looked like before and has to rebuild itself from scratch.

If a wrongness takes fire damage, the dust coating its body bursts into flame, inflicting 4 points of damage in an immediate area (or just 1 point with a successful Speed defense roll). This can happen only every few rounds, as it takes a little while for the creature's body to replenish its dust coating. During this time, it loses its modification to stealth.

About once an hour, a wrongness can expel its dust onto a small object or area about 5 feet (1.5 m) square, making that thing appear absolutely black, like the wrongness itself. It uses this to conceal an item it wants, or to create the appearance of a hole in the ground (or to obscure an actual hole).

Interaction: Wrongness are strange, confusing creatures. They sometimes act like they want to communicate or can understand language, but then lead people into an ambush, a deep hole, a collapsing mine tunnel, or another hazard. They have been seen playing with corpses of things they killed, including making chewing motions, but they don't appear to actually eat anything, and they might just be mimicking predator or scavenger behavior they've seen.

Use: A misshapen beast has been luring or chasing miners into dangerous areas. Something darker than midnight watches people on a particular stretch of road.

Loot: A dead wrongness takes a single, simple form: that of a pile of coal dust. The collected dust can be used as a cypher material relating to fire damage or protection.

Connection: A character remembers tales of misshapen creatures spotted just before a deadly mining disaster. A character remembers the feeling of being watched by a shadow as they tended to a person dying of black lung.

GM Intrusions: The wrongness causes a tunnel collapse in an immediate area, inflicting damage and trapping the character beneath rubble until they are freed.

A character breathes in a lungful of the wrongness's dust and must succeed at a hindered Might defense roll or lose their next action due to hacking and coughing.

A wrongness is just one of the many creatures in Old Gods of Appalachia whose names tell you a great deal about them.

Some wrongnesses that have spent a long time near humans can roughly mimic the overall shape of a human child, but the result is inaccurate, disturbing, and eerie.





5

Part 6: ADVENTURES



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Chapter 21:

THE LUTHIER'S FOLLY

A luthier is a craftsman who builds and repairs string instruments. The term comes from the French word for lute.

This adventure is designed for beginning characters. It's also presented in a style that gives new GMs helpful hints along the way about how to run the adventure. If you're an experienced GM, feel free to ignore those and go your own way. They're just there in case you find more guidance helpful.

"The Luthier's Folly" takes place mostly in and around a single location, so it's great for a first adventure, allowing players and PCs to get familiar with the setting and to establish and lean on connections within a community.

SYNOPSIS

"The Luthier's Folly" starts in Stonega, Virginia, a coal-mining town that all the PCs should be at least a little familiar with. Maybe they grew up here, maybe they came back to visit family, or maybe they've taken a job here recently.

During a celebration at the community center with live music, one of the fiddle players suddenly begins to fervently play a new song. The other members of the band join in, some of them looking very surprised.

As the song plays on, many of those in the band as well as in the audience start to notice that their bodies are showing sudden signs of aging: wrinkled skin, weird aches and pains, gray hair. The longer the music goes on, the more obvious the changes become. If the music stops, the changes don't continue, but they don't revert either.

It turns out the musician, Leenie Reeves, had her fiddle recently repaired by a visiting luthier. She says she's been dreaming of this song ever since, and it just came over her to play it. The other musicians seem confused and uncertain about what happened; they

didn't know the tune before they began playing it along with Leenie.

One of the town's grannies, Miss Odessa, says she's heard of this kind of thing, but she's never seen it personally. Although she doesn't know exactly what this one's all about, they should track down the luthier if they want to find out.

The luthier's name is Pollard Bales, and he's still in town. The PCs can track him to a boarding house, where they find him looking frail and weak. He claims he's just as much a victim in all this as anyone else, saying he came into town by way of a laurel thicket in the south, and he got lost in there for a long time. So long he thought he was dead. When he came out, the world felt different. He felt different. Strong. Young. But then it all started to fade away, leaving him as the PCs find him now.

In order to help, the PCs can head into the laurel thicket. There, they learn the secret of what happened—or part of it, anyway. A sentient tree stands in the middle of the thicket, ancient but powerful. She was grown here on purpose to cage a horrible beast called the Cindering. She's done her duty for aeons now, but she is old and tired, and she seeks to be free of her burden. A man came and told her he'd help her find a replacement if she gave him some of her wood for a repair and helped him out of the thicket. She did, but he never came back, and she cursed him and any that would play or hear music from her wood.

The Cindering, though trapped, is neither asleep nor dead. And it can talk to the PCs, in a voice like a thousand insectoid legs through their minds.

There are many directions the PCs can go from here.

GETTING FAMILIAR

Stonega, VA: A quintessential coal-mining town, Stonega's tucked all the way into the westernmost corner of Virginia, right next to Stone Gap, which lets you pass through the mountains to Kentucky. Nestled in a hollow between hills and woods, the town's got all the necessities, provided by the Crimson Coal & Coke Company, including one- and two-story houses in rows, a commissary (company store), a schoolhouse, a well-equipped hospital, the Stonega Roman Catholic Church, and a rather large cemetery.

For a coal-mining town, it's got quite a lot to boast about, but one thing rises above all others: a two-story community center and theater. One that not only shows the latest movie releases but hosts live performances as well. Here is where everything good happens in this little town. Dances, community theater, pie-eating contests, first kisses, spinning circles, and just about everything else you can think of.

For the most part, Stonega's a safe little town, or as safe as a town can be that's built on the brokeback spine of coal-mining land. Of course, it's got the usual fights, hardships, and mining injuries and deaths, but for the most part people here watch out for each other all right and do their best to take good care.

Jimmie's Hell: Most of Stonega's surrounded by normal woods—thick as the devil, of course, but not half as dangerous—but to the south, near Steadler's farm, is what's commonly called a “laurel hell,” a giant patch of laurel trees so tall, thick,

and twisted that some say it's got its own weather and time. A man and a dog might walk in there on a bright sunny morning and not walk out until six days later in the deepest snow they've ever seen, thinking only a day has passed. Still, they'd do well to consider themselves lucky, for some never come out at all.

This particular one's called Jimmie's Hell, for old Jimmie Beckler, who once claimed the laurel thicket stole his favorite hog, and he went in after her. The hog came home a few days later, but Jimmie never did.

The Sentient Tree: Deep inside the thatched maze that is Jimmie's Hell lives a sentient tree so old and powerful that her grandkids' grandkids grew, fell, and rotted into the belly of a borer ages before Stonega even had a name to speak of. She grows over a buried beast, a **Middle Thing** of the Inner Dark called the Cindering, her roots binding it to its prison beneath the ground. But not all is what it seems, and it will turn out that she's not really a sentient tree after all, but something molded into the shape of a tree.

The Cindering: This is the beast that slumbers still beneath the sentient tree's great roots. A slithering centipede-like creature that's as long as a railway car and half as big around, the Cindering belongs to a **Deep Thing**, although which one is anybody's guess. It was interrupted in its mission and has been trapped here a long time. Freeing it would be a very bad idea indeed.

Stonega is pronounced like stone-ga (two syllables) because it's a shortening of “Stone Gap.”



Middle Thing, page 188

Deep Thing, page 189

- They can offer to find another way to keep the beast locked up so the tree can be done with her obligation. This will nullify the effects of the cursed wood and reverse the damage done.
- They can find all the wood pieces that the luthier used and try to cleanse them with a special fire ritual. This will not undo the curse's effects, but it will make sure it doesn't keep happening.

- They can try to release the Cindering by their own means. This will not undo the curse's effects, and it will likely put the PCs in direct danger.
- They can track down someone from the mining company willing to pay good money for the knowledge of a powerful beast so close to town.
- They can come up with some other way of dealing with the issue.

All of these choices are viable, but they all come with a cost.

One of the places that one or more of the PCs might have come from is a nearby mining town called Trillium.

*Boundaries and consent,
page 14*

Consent checklist, page 411

Not everyone in town loves the idea that there are dances happening. Many people with strong religious ties frown upon dancing. But music and dancing have always been part of building Appalachian communities, from neighbors celebrating the completion of a barn with a barn dance to workers singing together while on strike.

During the time of this adventure, in the real world, Stonega was segregated with separate churches, schools, and community halls. Because this is an alternative version of history, we've chosen to leave that aspect up to the group. Not to pretend it didn't exist, but so that, if the group wishes, PCs of all ethnicities and backgrounds can move through the world equally and share the important spaces in the adventure.

You can choose to keep the segregation as part of your adventure, using that tension as part of the narrative, provided that your group has a careful discussion of **boundaries and consent** ahead of time.

GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

For this adventure, the characters should be at least a little familiar with Stonega. Share the information in the Getting Familiar section on page 391 with them to give them a sense of the place.

Ask the players to choose why their characters are in town. Reasons include (but are not limited to):

- They grew up here and have never lived elsewhere.
- They grew up here and have returned for a short visit to family or friends.
- They grew up here and returned to live here after falling on hard times (or good times).
- They moved here for a job or a person.
- They've been staying a while on their way to somewhere else.

Whatever the reason the characters are here, each should have a connection to one of the local NPCs. Describe the NPCs listed in Who's Who at the Dance and ask each player to choose one and describe their



WHO'S WHO AT THE DANCE

Opaline ("Leenie") Reaves: The leader of Stonega's beloved local band, Fiddlin' Opaline and the Shape Notes, this young woman has the fastest hands and the sassiest tunes this side of the West Virginia line. She grew up in these parts and often helps her ma out at the general store, but anyone can see it's the music that lights her up inside.

Florence ("Effie") Thomas: A tall, strong woman with a long black braid, the world's best apple stack cake recipe, and a perhaps-too-intimate knowledge of everyone's goings-on, she's also got a voice to make you weep. When she lifts her voice and sings, whether at church, in a play, or as part of the band, you can just feel your cares fall away and your mouth turn up in a smile.

Aurelia Norman: Aurelia doesn't like most people half as well as she likes animals, but she believes in the power of community and will give you the shirt off her clothesline if she senses you need it. Usually dressed in pants and a flannel shirt, she's got a no-nonsense air that might put someone off, but all that goes away on the dance floor, where she moves like one of those wild creatures she loves so much.

Gaines Cormey: Gaines works the mines all day and works the whiskey all night, and somehow he keeps on keepin' on. Maybe it's his wicked sense of humor, his two wild teenage boys, or his curious nature that sustains him. Whatever it is, if you need a strong arm to pick you up, a dancer to lead you, or a hearty laugh to lighten your day, he's your man.

Deion Beaty: Long ago, Deion dreamed of riding the rails, going anywhere they would take him, but now he's a foreman at the mine and only goes places in his imagination. Natty and reserved, Deion's hard to get to know, but rumors say he's not afraid of getting his hands dirty for the right price or the right amount of power.

Odessa Windburne-Malloy: You can call her Miss Odessa, like everyone else in these parts. She's everyone's granny and no one's sweetheart, and that's just fine by her. You need fixing, cursing, or general magic-making, you come right to her and she'll fix you up.

Opaline ("Leenie") Reaves: level 2, music as level 4; plays a fiddle that was passed down to her by her pawpaw

Pawpaw's repaired fiddle: level 4. Anyone who touches it feels a strong urge to play a particular song (even if they don't know how to play the fiddle). Characters who fail a level 4 Intellect defense roll start to play that song, which begins to age all hearing beings in long range who fail a level 4 Intellect defense roll. (See *The Unknown Tune*, page 394).

Florence ("Effie") Thomas: level 2, entertaining and singing as level 4

Aurelia Norman: level 2

Gaines Cormey: level 2, positive social interactions and dancing as level 3

Deion Beaty: level 3

Miss Odessa: level 3, magic as level 4; carries a ceramic knife in her boot

Miss Odessa's ceramic knife (artifact): level 5; inflicts +3 damage against magical entities, comes due 1 in 1d10 (check each attack against a magical entity; after it comes due, it still functions as a regular knife)

Comes due, page 331

GM Tip: Use the information in the *Who's Who at the Dance* section (above) to flesh out the NPCs in conversation. While there are likely many other people at the dance, it's fine to focus on the NPCs detailed in *Who's Who at the Dance* to keep the adventure streamlined. However, if you'd like to add more NPCs to the dance, feel free to do so.

relationship, such as mother, friend, partner, childhood nemesis, and so on. More than one PC can be connected to the same NPC, but they should have different relationships with that character (for example, one is a son and the other is a co-worker).

Once the players have established their connections to the town and the NPCs, you can set the scene for them arriving at the dance in the community center. This is where the adventure begins.

THE DANCE BEGINS

The dance at the community center is a lively affair, one that brings out a good portion of the community dressed in their finest and ready to chat, chow down, and dance away their troubles. All of the NPCs that the PCs have connections to are there, as well as many others.

As everyone arrives and the band begins to set up, it's a great opportunity for the characters to interact with each other and with the NPCs. You can invite them to talk about why they're at the dance—maybe they've got a business deal going with someone, there's someone they've taken a fancy to, or they just love music and dancing. Encourage them to describe what they're doing, and use the opportunity to roleplay the NPCs in conversation with the PCs.

Once the PCs have had a chance to mingle and share their stories, it's time to get the band up on stage. The band has four members, but the one everyone really comes to hear is Leenie Reaves. She plays a bunch of instruments, but tonight she's got her pawpaw's fiddle out and everyone knows that means they're in for a real treat.

The first song—a sweet melody—gets everyone joining in. Dancing, tapping their

GM Tip: As you prepare to take on the roles of the NPCs in the adventure, take a few minutes to add your own details on their ethnicities, ages, backgrounds, voices, religious beliefs, and anything else that you think might deepen them. Be sure to talk with your players too about their expectations when it comes to connections. If, for example, a PC is Black and chooses one of the NPCs to be their parent, you'll likely want to make the NPC Black as well.

See *Getting to Know Appalachia*, page 180, for more information on the ethnicities and religious beliefs of those who live in the region.

The art on page 294 is a great example of the type of dance that the PCs are attending. You can show it to the players or use it as inspiration to create your own descriptions.

GM Tip: If you'd like to play some fiddle tunes to set the stage during this part of the adventure, you can find many options online by searching things like "Appalachian fiddle tunes of the 1920s" or "Traditional Appalachian fiddle playing."

Music created specifically for this game is also available at: mymcg.info/songsofbloodanddarkness

GM Tip: If you feel up to including an NPC through the adventure, you could have Leenie or one of the other NPCs offer to accompany the PCs. However, if you're new to GMing or don't want to worry about an additional character, you can just come up with reasons that none of the NPCs go with the group (such as they want to take care of the other townspeople).

feet, clapping to the music. The second song, a more lively tune, starts off the same way, but midway through, Leenie starts playing a new song, one that doesn't sound quite like anything else. After a moment's pause, the other band members join in, surprised looks on their faces.

All around, as the song plays, community members (including the musicians) are changing. They start to appear visibly older—more wrinkles on their skin, their hair going gray, their spines growing crooked, their lively dance steps slowing down.

THE UNKNOWN TUNE

PCs must succeed on a level 4 Intellect defense roll to not be affected. If they are affected, have them roll a d6 to determine the effect. The effect lasts until the curse is removed.

d6 Effect

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Their hair goes gray or white, or falls out. |
| 2 | Their skin grows wrinkled. |
| 3 | They have trouble remembering some words, names, or other details (hindered on all tasks involving memory). |
| 4 | Their vision worsens (hindered on all tasks involving sight). |
| 5 | Their hearing worsens (hindered on all tasks involving hearing). |
| 6 | They gain a pain or weakness in their leg (hindered in all tasks involving walking, running, or climbing). |

Here's how the connected NPCs are affected:

Leenie: Although she doesn't seem to be getting older, she plays her fiddle with a kind of frenzy, almost as if she's unable to stop. The PCs can attempt to help her stop by talking to her, taking the fiddle from her, or anything else they think of trying. Leenie mostly seems confused by what's happening, but she does say that she's felt compelled to play the fiddle even more than usual ever since she recently had it repaired by a traveling luthier named Pollard Bales.

Effie: Her voice grows cracked and strained, even as her long black hair turns white at the temples. She appears to be shrinking, as if her spine is growing shorter. The changes seem to be making her angry, although she has nowhere in particular to direct her ire.

Aurelia: Aurelia tries to act as if nothing's happening, but her hands are shaking badly enough that she crams them in her pockets to hide them. She has a little trouble remembering people's names, even when she's talking with them, and looks a little like a spooked horse. If the PCs ask her about the luthier, she's sure she saw him near that boarding place on that street down by the water on her way here. (The PCs will likely be able to suss out that she means Gilman's Boarding House.)

Gaines: His hip locks up, making it difficult for him to move without pain. His hair starts to go salt and pepper. Despite it all, he tries to make light of the situation, soothing those who are most in pain or scared. If the PCs are having trouble getting Leenie to stop playing, Gaines is likely to step in and help them out, granting an asset on their attempts.

Deion: Deion's vision is affected, making it harder for him to see. Despite that, he tries to create a plan to keep the chaos down.

Miss Odessa: Miss Odessa appears almost immune to the song's effect. Almost. Each time her body changes—hair going gray, strength failing her, eyesight dimming—she's able to bring herself back, but it seems like it's taking a lot of her energy and focus. Despite that, she's able to say that she's seen something similar to this before. She suggests finding the luthier. She doesn't have the energy to heal the PCs, but if they say they're going to track down the luthier, she offers them the special knife she keeps in her boot.

TRACKING THE LUTHIER

The man's name is Pollard Bales. He repaired Leenie's fiddle a few days ago, which is the last time anyone around town remembers seeing him. Asking around will lead the PCs to Gilman's Boarding House, where he was staying while he was in town

(and where he still is, although most people don't know that).

Gilman's Boarding House: This small building in the northern part of town has a reputation for its no-nonsense rules and excellent meals. Some say the miners who stay there can work twice as hard and for twice as long as those who eat elsewhere, but whether that's magic or just imagination, no one's saying. Run by **Ruth Gilman** and her partner **Bittie Connor**, the house has a dozen rooms that are always full and a dozen boarders who are always respectful. Ruth's a tiny woman with a big dress and a bigger presence, and her ability to suss out what people need when they need it is downright uncanny.

Bittie's nickname comes from her size—she's tall and broad and there's nothing bitty about her. She does all repairs, keeps the boarders in line, and sees to it that someone takes care of Ruth while Ruth takes care of everyone else.

The PCs can find Pollard in his room—"Second floor, third on the left. He's been in there two days," says Ruth. A knock doesn't bring a response and the **door is locked**.

Inside the small room, the air smells strongly of fresh-cut wood and rotting fruit. **Pollard Bales** is curled up on the floor, moaning in pain and shivering. He seems afraid of the PCs at first, acting as if they're hallucinations, but can be calmed (a level 4 Intellect task that is eased if the PCs also offer food, water, or healing).

If the PCs tell him what happened at the dance, Pollard reacts with horror at the news and says it's all his fault.

Depending on his condition, Pollard tells some or all of the following story: he travels all up and down the state, and he was on his way into town to offer his services when he took what he thought was a shortcut through the woods along the southern border of town. But he ended up lost in a thick laurel grove, where he wandered for a long time. The PCs will likely recognize the place he's describing as Jimmie's Hell.

He's not sure if it was days or weeks, or maybe even longer. He thought he was dead, when he came upon a giant talking tree. "Sure I was hallucinating," he says. "Sure I was paying for all my sins on the way to meet my maker."

But the tree—a sentient tree as big around as a dozen men—was real, and it told him the way out. All he had to do, he says, is take some of her wood and use it in some instruments to help spread her voice around.

PCs who succeed on a level 3 Intellect task can tell that Pollard isn't exactly telling the truth. With some persuasion or intimidation, they might get him to tell the real story: he made a bargain with the tree that he didn't keep. The tree told him she was a prisoner and wished to be free. She offered him a piece of her wood that would show him the way out if he would return and free her. He said yes but was afraid to go back. And then eventually he told himself it was all a hallucination created from his starved, lost mind. He used the wood to fix Leenie's fiddle a few days ago and shortly after started to feel sick and weak, and he's been here ever since.

Pollard begs the PCs to help him, saying he's got a family waiting for him back in **Paradise**. Saying he didn't mean to forgo the bargain, but he can't bring himself to go back.

GETTING READY

It should be clear to the PCs that their trip into Jimmie's Hell isn't likely to be a one-day adventure. They may want to stock up on supplies, wait until dawn, and so on before they head in.

Ruth and Bittie will provide a single room and a breakfast for the group if they want to spend the night in town before they head out. The **general store** run by Leenie's mom, Gettie Mae, probably has most things in stock that the PCs might want to purchase. Of course, if the characters live in town, they can just go back to their homes for the night or to grab what they need.

JIMMIE'S HELL

No one really knows how much land this dense and twisted thicket of laurel covers. Some say it's miles long, some say just a few acres, and still others say distances aren't even close to the right kind of measurement when it comes to places like this. What everyone does know is that it's best to stay outside its borders unless you've got a mighty fine reason to venture inside.

Ruth Gilman: level 2; perception, healing, and cooking as level 4

Bittie Connor: level 2; intimidation, persuasion, and smashing as level 3; carries a hammer on her hip and isn't afraid to use it


Paradise, page 250

Locked door: level 3, resists breaking as level 4

Pollard Bales: level 3, repair and crafting musical instruments as level 4; carries a big leather bag full of tools

Goods and services, page 122

Jimmie's Hell

- 
1. FALLING-DOWN BARN
 2. BEAR TRAIL ENTRANCE
 3. ROCKSLIDE
 4. THE HOLE AT THE END OF THE WOOD
 5. THE OLD BOAR
 6. GHOST HOLLOW
 7. SENTIENT TREE

There are two obvious ways to enter the thicket. The first is along the back of Steadler's farm, where a falling-down barn has created a bit of an entryway into the laurel, and the second is an old bear trail that starts across from the fishing hole on Honey Creek. If the PCs stick to the trail, they're able to move along it easily, although they may encounter various obstacles along the way, as shown on the map.

LAUREL HELL

The **laurel hell** is a single living, breathing—and currently sleeping—entity, bound together by an intricate root system. The more it realizes that unwelcome beings (in this case, mostly the PCs) are inside its skin, the more likely it is to wake up and attempt to protect itself. Each time the laurel hell takes damage, whether from a character attempting to hack or burn through it, a bear bursting through the woods to attack the characters, someone picking a laurel flower, or something else, it begins to stir, waking slightly from its deep slumber.

The thicket can change the shape of the paths running through it, represented by three different maps. When the PCs first enter the thicket, use map 1 on the previous page. Later events in this portion of the adventure may have you change to a different version of the thicket map.

Use a version of **What Wakes Mode** as follows:

Each time the laurel hell takes damage, increase the range of numbers that trigger a GM intrusion by 1. So the first time the laurel is damaged, an intrusion is triggered on a 1 or 2 instead of a 1. The second time it's damaged, a roll of 1 to 3 triggers an intrusion. And so on.

Use the following intrusions as the laurel begins to wake. You can also use any of these intrusions as regular **GM intrusions** at any time. The laurel doesn't like having living creatures inside it, even if they're not actively harming it.



If the PCs have any lingering effects from the curse of the tune, remind them to take that into account when attempting relevant tasks.

Come to Me: Long green tendrils snake out to all PCs in short range of the laurel. Those who fail a level 4 Speed defense roll find themselves grasped and squeezed for 4 points of damage each round (once caught, the victim can attempt a level 4 Might task each round to break free).

The Scent of You: The laurel flowers release an almond- and cherry-scented cloud into the air. All creatures within short range of the cloud who can smell it and who fail a level 4 Might defense roll begin to cough and choke on the cloying smell. The effect lasts until they move out of range of the cloud or until they heal in some fashion (such as by making a recovery roll).

Get Out: The laurel begins to close in on the characters, creating a prison of branches and leaves that grows tighter with each passing round. All creatures who fail a level 4 Intellect defense roll feel claustrophobic and hemmed in, taking 3 points of Intellect damage (ignores Armor). Each successful attack against the prison increases the GM intrusion range by 1.

Green Protector: The laurel calls forth a **creature** made of leaves and thorns. The creature roars on the round before it attacks, causing hearing creatures within short range who fail a level 4 Intellect defense roll to spend their next turn trembling in fear and unable to take an action.

Darkness Falls: Night comes much faster than the characters expect, causing them to become disoriented and sleepy. Characters who don't sleep in the next ten minutes (for at least an hour or two) experience hallucinations that their bodies are sprouting leaves and roots.

Shape-Shift: The laurel shifts, rearranging itself in an attempt to trap all creatures within its border. The sound is of roots pulling up and trees falling slantwise and giant beings stepping across the land, but there is nothing for the characters to see. In fact, they likely won't know what's happened until they attempt to find their way out. Switch to a new map each time this happens.

Laurel hell: level 4; health 50; Armor 1; each time the laurel hell takes damage, it begins to wake up

Damaging objects, page 146

Creature: level 4; health 12; Armor 1; attack inflicts 4 points of damage. Each successful attack against the creature increases the GM intrusion range by 1.

What Wakes Mode, page 297

GM intrusion, page 162

Old boar: level 4, stealth and attacks as level 5

Ghost with no name: level 3; it's a level 5 persuasion task to get him to share his secret for getting out of the laurel hell alive, which is to perform a ritual using a powerful magic item (level 4 or higher)

Ritual: The night before the characters wish to leave, they must all write their names on the same cypher or artifact (level 4 or higher) and bury it in the dirt where they will sleep. In the morning, the object will be gone, and all of the characters whose names were inscribed will gain assets in navigation, mapping, and other tasks related to leaving the laurel hell. The assets last until they find their way out.

Hole: level 4

Charm of protection, page 317

Rockslide: level 5

OBSTACLES AND ENCOUNTERS

The Old Boar: Ancient, grizzled, and huge, the **old boar** is not a creature of magic, but he is powerful nonetheless. Perhaps it comes from having lived so long among the laurels, or perhaps it's just that he is a king among his kind. He guards his home with great fervor, and those who stumble into his lands must pay the price.

The Ghost With No Name: Those who've grown up in the area and heard the stories might expect to find Jimmie's ghost, but that's not what happens. Instead, in a hollow along the path, they encounter the **ghost** of another young man. He doesn't remember his name and doesn't seem to know he's dead. He says he's been living here a long time and knows a secret way to get out of the laurel hell alive.

The Hole at the End of the Wood: This hidden **hole** might once have been a trap, or perhaps it's a natural anomaly. About 6 feet (2 m) across and 20 feet (6 m) deep, the hole covers the entire trail, making it difficult to avoid even if you do see it in time. At the bottom are numerous bones of both animals and humans, as well as a \$5 scrip coin and a level 3 **charm of protection**.

The Rockslide: If the PCs travel up the river instead of using one of the paths, they encounter a recent **rockslide** part way along it. The rockslide blocks the river as a possible path but has revealed what seems to have been a hideout. There's very little left inside it—just an old campfire and some cooking pans—but it offers a safe place for the characters to rest or take shelter.

THE SENTIENT TREE

With a little luck on their side, the PCs eventually arrive at the sentient tree herself.

The seed of her was planted so long ago that it was likely not human hands that did the digging but something much older and much, much more powerful. She towers over the laurel hell, yet she can't be seen until you're standing beneath her wide-spreading branches. To some, she looks like an ash tree; to others, a red oak; to a certain few, a yellow poplar; but to most, she looks like some unknown combination of all of these, or none

The goal of the maps and the shifting laurel is to make the characters feel like they're getting stuck and lost, but you don't want the players to be stuck in the maze for hours of table time. It's fine to have the PCs arrive at the tree even if they pick the wrong path. Don't keep them trapped so long that the players get frustrated and aren't having fun anymore. This is also true for getting them out.

of them. Her leaves shift inside the wind, her bark undulates and peels and begins anew. It's hard to look at her, yet hard to look away.

When she speaks, it's with the voice of your grandmother's grandmother's grandmother, and it's tired with the weight and worry of the world. She shows no fear of the characters and doesn't attempt to intimidate or harm them, as is the way with those who carry far more power than others around them. Instead, she asks what they seek.

Things the tree might tell them:

- She is not, in fact, a sentient tree, although she understands how others might think that and she grew tired of trying to correct them. She was once a tiny creature of the muck and mud who was turned into a seed and then into a tree. She still remembers the joy of existing as a tiny, unnoticed thing, and it is to this that she truly wishes to return.
- She was given a purpose on the day she was planted: to hold captive a dark creature beneath her roots. She can't be free to return to her former self until another cage is found for that beast or it's destroyed entirely.
- If the PCs agree to assist her, she can give them a way to undo the curse that befell them and those they care about.
- As she did for Pollard, she also offers the PCs something they want if they will assist her. If they're kind to her, she suggests they think on it for a while and wish for something much larger than a way out of the thicket.
- She has no name because one was never given to her, but she would like to have one someday.

THE SENTIENT TREE

Level 7, Speed defense as level 5 due to size; health 30; Armor 2; does not attack unless she feels the need to defend herself. A swipe with one of her limbs inflicts 7 points of damage and knocks the foe prone; she can attack up to two creatures within short range this way on a single action.

As a separate action, she can also curse those she chooses by embedding a piece of wood into their body, such as by giving them a splinter. Her curses can take many forms, but each is unique to the victim.

For example, if someone loves dancing, she might make them dance without stopping, or if someone is afraid of spiders, she might make it so they see spiders everywhere. Those who fail a level 7 Might defense roll are affected in this way and are also knocked one step down the **damage track**. Characters can get rid of their curse by moving themselves back up the damage track, using a cypher or other magic object that can break a curse, or seeking out a granny or someone experienced in curses to remove it.

Damage track, page 141



GM Intrusions: While you'll likely want to focus most of your intrusions on the laurel wood waking up, don't hesitate to add something new and unexpected. Perhaps a catamount stalks the PCs, someone steps on a nest of yellowjackets, or they run into another person out in the woods. Additionally, the laurel wood might assist the creatures who live within it in some way, such as by creating a path for the old boar to dodge into or sneak attack from.

Catamount, page 347

Yellowjackets: level 3; attack as a single swarm that inflicts 3 points of damage on up to two people within close range of each other

The Cindering: level 6, Speed defense as level 5 due to size, resists mental attacks as level 7; health 20; Armor 2 (immune to poison); mental attack inflicts 5 points of damage and hinders all Intellect tasks for one round

The Cindering acts as a creature 1 level lower while imprisoned, so treat it as level 5, with Speed defense as level 4, and so on.

THE CINDERING

Once the characters approach the sentient tree and begin talking to her, **the Cindering** chooses a PC to interact with. It can tell who is the most likely to be able to hear it, so it picks the most accessible PC to try first (probably the one who is the most emotionally invested in fixing the situation or the one with the least amount of protection against mental attacks). If that attack fails, the Cindering attempts to interact with the next most vulnerable PC, and so on until it's able to reach someone.

Interaction: Those the Cindering reaches out to hear a sound in their head like an immeasurable number of dry, papery legs sliding through moist flesh, a shudder-inducing whisper that seems like it could be understood as words if the listener would just give it all their attention.

A creature targeted by the Cindering's mental attack who fails a level 5 Intellect defense roll instantly has the sensation of being given something they deeply desire.

The desire might be for something concrete, like taking a trip to a specific place or receiving a much-wanted gift, or it might be for something more broad, such as being deeply loved or feeling fulfilled. For one round, they can do nothing but revel in this incredible experience, this perfect moment that fills them with positive emotions.

The next round, the experience—and the emotions that went with it—are whipped away, leaving the creature filled with such deep longing for it to be returned that they can barely breathe. This is when the Cindering makes its proposal: asking them to free it and in exchange, it promises to give that emotion, sensation, or object back to them forever. (It's lying.)

A character affected by the Cindering's mental attack takes 5 points of Intellect damage and is hindered in all Intellect actions for one round.

RELEASE

The Cindering can be released from its prison by killing the sentient tree and then using some part of its wood to dig down between the tree's roots, which are wrapped like a web around the beast.

If the Cindering is released, it emerges from the ground with the speed and force of an explosion. Its segmented, armored body is nearly 50 feet (15 m) long and 5 feet (1.5 m) around, and it has so many long, disjointed legs that trying to comprehend them all seems to make reality bend and waver. Beneath its armored segments, hundreds of smaller versions of itself wriggle and writhe, slithering in and out of its carapace.

If the Cindering is freed from its prison, it can continue to use its mental attack, or it might use one of its two physical attacks:

Fungal Attack: All along the Cindering's body, a poisonous fungal growth thrives. With a shake of its body, it releases these spores into the air, inflicting 3 points of damage on all creatures within short range who breathe and who fail a Might defense roll. Those affected take 1 point of damage per round for the next five rounds.

Whip: Up to a dozen smaller versions of the Cindering form into a single line, whipping out and inflicting 6 points of damage on a single character within short range.



ENDING THE ADVENTURE

At this point, the PCs have a number of options, including the following.

- ❶ Make a promise to the sentient tree to help her find another way to keep the beast locked away so the tree can be done with her obligation (or, alternatively, that they will find someone or something powerful enough to help them defeat the Cindering). If the PCs make this promise to her and aren't lying in their intention to keep it, she agrees to lift the curse, even if it might take the characters years to release her. After all, she's waited this long. What's a few more human years?

If the characters choose this option, any effects they have from the curse disappear, and the tree tells them that the same will happen to anyone affected in town.

The sentient tree tells them that when they get out of the laurel hell, they should each privately write down the thing they wish in exchange, ideally in a book with power, such as their family bible or a collection of poetry. Once they free her, that thing will come to fruition. She also warns them to be careful of their wording and to make sure that they're asking for something they truly desire.

- ❷ Decide not to help the sentient tree (or say that they'll help, but lie). She is deeply saddened by this, but says that if they find all the pieces of her that Pollard took and burn them in a magical fire, it will stop the curse from getting worse (but will not undo the effects that have already occurred).
- ❸ Try to release the Cindering by their own means. This requires killing the sentient tree first, which is no small feat. And then they have to deal with the Cindering. This is a sure-fire way for a whole lot of PCs to get killed or cursed, or both.
- ❹ Track down someone (perhaps **Deion Beaty**?) who would pay good money for the knowledge of a powerful beast so close to town.
- ❺ Some other way of dealing with the issue.

All of these choices are viable, but they all come with a cost.

LEAVING THE LAUREL

Whatever the PCs decide, they must now get themselves out of Jimmie's Hell. Time moves strangely in this place, so however long they think this portion of the adventure has taken them (based on how many times they slept or how many times night came), it's been at least five days more than that.

If they made a promise to the sentient tree, they find that the curse has been lifted from everyone in town, and they're treated as heroes, especially by Leenie and Pollard. But now the PCs must find a way to fulfill their promise. (Until they do, they all dream of her every night—not as she was in the laurel hell, but as she was before. Before time, before trees, before she became a safeholder for the world. As a small dark creature, joyous and long-limbed, basking in the mud that was once her home.)

If they chose to burn the pieces of wood instead, when they get back to town they see that everyone has grown a bit older since they left. Miss Odessa helps them build a magical fire. It takes seven days for the wood to fully burn.

If they chose another option, they and the NPCs continue to age faster than normal (although slower than when the music was being played). Most of them age about four years for every one. It won't be long before Stonega becomes known as a cursed town, one where no one wants to go.

WHAT'S NEXT?

If the players want to continue this tale with their characters, you might have them go to *Paradise* or another large town to talk to powerful entities and learn how they can fulfill their promise to the sentient tree, either by releasing her from her duties or by destroying the Cindering.

Paradise, page 250

EXPERIENCE POINT AWARDS

If the PCs alleviate the curse, they each gain 2 XP. If they make it out of the laurel hell alive, they also gain 2 XP each. These awards are in addition to any XP earned from GM intrusions.

Deion Beaty, page 393

Chapter 22:

WHAT PATHS MAY CROSS

This adventure is best for players who have some experience and background in alternate Appalachia. It's designed to give the GM lots of open-ended opportunities and to allow the characters to explore the world—and themselves—in interesting ways.

"What Paths May Cross" can be located anywhere within the region where there are railroads and a railroad tunnel.

F.B. Larkin, page 408

Ring of binding, page 407

SYNOPSIS

The adventure begins with a mysterious train derailment, one that miraculously caused no deaths but did cause a great deal of damage and seems to have attracted a large murmuration of starlings and various other birds to the site.

When the player characters (PCs) arrive, they quickly realize that this isn't any ordinary train derailment (if such a thing even exists). It occurred at the edge of a railroad tunnel with such a long history of misfortune that the only name anyone can remember it having is the Lorn. The last third of the train remains inside the tunnel, with the rest outside. Right at the tunnel's entrance, the earth has caved in and twisting roots are wrapping around the two cars that have fallen in, rising up to the sky.

On top of that, the conductor's been using his route to make a little money on the side by transporting things more powerful than coal; a young woman who's been train hopping around the region has made a powerful bargain with the Green; and a murmuration of starlings and other songbirds is twisting into various shapes—including the shape of a man—and striding through the sky.

As the PCs will discover over time, the train derailment was caused by a perfect storm of

events, one that no one could have predicted or, likely, prevented, even if they wanted to.

These events include:

A Powerful Ring: For the past few months, the conductor, a man named Rex Anderson, has been running illegal shipments of booze and other items (he usually doesn't ask) for an influential and well-paying businessperson named **F.B. Larkin**. This time, the shipment is a powerful **ring of binding**—and there are more people who want it than just F.B.

An Unfortunate Bargain: Elmira, the train-hopping young woman, made a bargain with the Green to protect her as she travels to rescue her brother. The Green's been following her, sending forth its roots and rhizomes to make sure she's safe. As the Green moved through the deep dark of the tunnel in pursuit, it disturbed a being of shade and shadow that had long nestled inside its hollows. Angered by the Green's trespass, this dark being manifested first as a colony of bats and then, as the Green passed out of the tunnel into the light, as a murmuration of songbirds, determined to destroy the interloper as it's destroyed so many others.

A Shady Opportunity: A mile or so south of the crash site sits the town of Kilridge, the kind of place where the train doesn't stop anymore because it has no reason to. The mine's dried up, the crops are barely holding, and there's something wrong with the fish in Kilridge Creek. Recently, a hollow-eyed stranger named Mister Stokely showed up in town, offering a goodly sum for the return of his "stolen" wedding ring that was being transported on the train. Even though they were pretty sure he was lying, a group of

three local young men named Colton, Otho, and Cricket agreed to take on the task—and have now gone missing, all except one, who is very surprised to be alive.

A Healing Hand: Of all the people in Kilridge, the one person who always knows what's going on is Nadine "Deen" Bolling. Those who know her would say she's kind and curious, and a fierce protector of anyone who gets in her heart. And she knows a Hollow Man when she sees one. So when she heard three of the town's boys headed off after a supposed stolen ring, she put on her best outfit, gathered everything she might need in her giant purse, and talked Willy Armitta, the former deputy sheriff, into driving her after those boys to see what's what.

A Ring Gone Down: The roots of the Green, sensing the creature of the dark coming for them, tore open the ground beneath the train tracks, cracking the earth wide. Into this large hole sank two of the train cars, including the one carrying the ring of binding, along with two of the three young men from town.

GETTING THE PCs INVOLVED

There are a number of ways to get the PCs involved, including:

- If the characters played through "[The Luthier's Folly](#)," you can continue that campaign by having them search for the ring of binding (to bind the [Cindering](#)).
- The PCs are on a train heading in the other direction, and their train is stopped by the accident ahead.
- When the accident occurs, the PCs are already in the general area for another reason (perhaps they were investigating the rumors about the cursed tunnel, visiting a family member or friend in the nearby town of Kilridge, or hoping to train hop for a bit to get somewhere they needed to go).
- Someone that the PCs have worked for in the past had someone or something valuable on the train and hired the characters to retrieve the person or item. (This could be the ring of binding, or it could be something else.) But the train hasn't shown up when and where it was expected.

THE TRAIN

The train, nicknamed the "Black Rat," has seven coal gondolas—cars with no top, a flat bottom, and fixed sides that are used for hauling coal—as well as two boxcars for hauling freight, and of course the locomotive. Because it was headed toward the mines, the coal gondolas are empty, but the boxcars are loaded with supplies for the mining town.

While the Black Rat might look like an ordinary train from the outside, it doesn't take much to figure out that it definitely isn't. For one thing, there's only one person running it: a young man named Rex Anderson who calls himself the conductor (although that's not exactly his job). The truth is that the train pretty much runs itself, thanks to some powerful workings by the coal company that owns it. Not only that, but it's generally protected from things like damage and catastrophe. Only no one expected a hole to open up in the ground and swallow things down—no matter how powerful you are, it's hard to protect against that.

The train's nickname comes not from a rodent, but from the black rat snake.

THE SCENE

The crash site is located about a mile outside of Kilridge. The tracks run through a valley with hills and woods stretching out on either side. There's not much else around.

The crash occurred shortly before the PCs come upon it, so everything's still in chaos, and the people involved have barely registered what's happened.

When the PCs arrive, here is where the NPCs are:

- **Rex** is stuck inside the engine, trying to get out.
- **Elmira** is standing next to the hole, trying to soothe the roots of the Green.
- **Colton and Otho** are trapped in the hole.
- **Cricket** can't be seen (he's run into the Lorn).

The Murmuration is in the shape of a huge human and heading toward the scene from the nearby woods.

- **Nadine "Deen" Bolling and Willy Armitta** arrive from Kilridge after the PCs have been on the scene for a bit.

The Luthier's Folly, page 390
Cindering, page 400

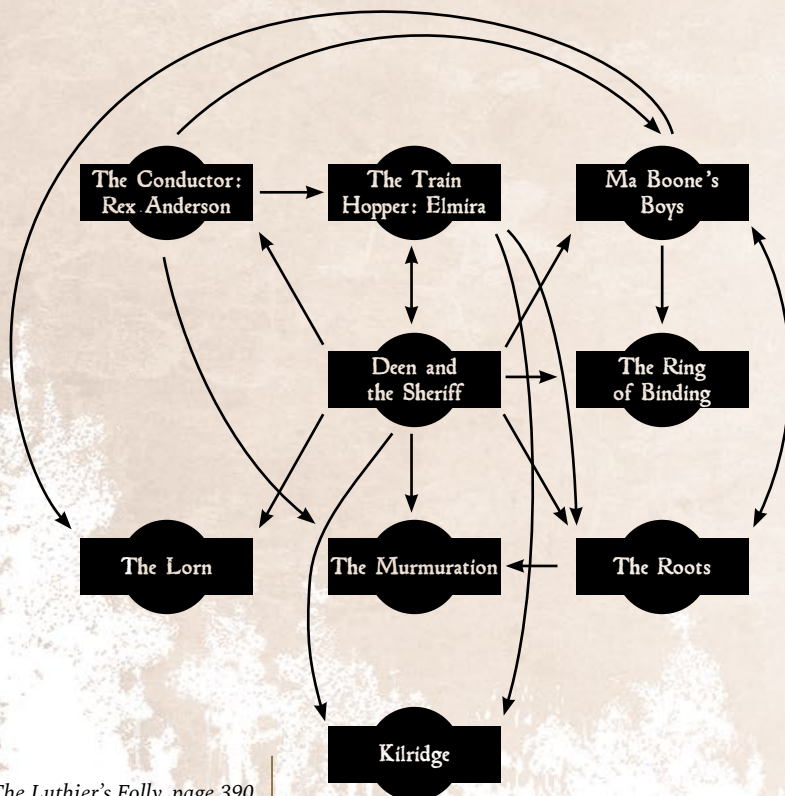
The Conductor: Rex Anderson, page 405

The Train Hopper: Elmira, page 405

Ma Boone's Boys, page 405
The Lorn, page 406

The Murmuration, page 407

Deen and the Sheriff, page 406



The PCs can decide which path interests them the most (or perhaps, eventually, they will decide to follow all of them). They may do one or more of the following:

- Help those who've been injured and try to solve the mystery of how the accident occurred
- Find a way to deal with the roots of the Green
- Find a way to deal with the Murmuration
- Recover the ring of binding themselves, either to sell it or to use it (possibly to bind the Cindering, if they've completed the adventure "*The Luthier's Folly*")
- Help Elmira continue to track down her brother
- Something else

Whatever choices they make will likely lead them to their next step. Use the adventure flow chart to keep track of which future interaction or encounter each of the PCs' actions might lead to.

It's also possible that the PCs decide to split up, with each of the smaller groups taking on different tasks. While this requires more work from you as the GM to keep track of things and make sure each group has a chance to move forward, it can also create a strong sense of the kind of chaos that can happen during accidents like this.

THE CONDUCTOR: REX ANDERSON

The conductor of the train, **Rex Anderson**, is in his mid-thirties, with soft eyes and a kind smile. He's dressed in a dark suit and a blue conductor hat. When the PCs arrive, he's trapped inside the engine, where the door is jammed shut. He's uninjured but badly shaken and is worried about his cargo (both the ring and Elmira, who he's become quite fond of).

If the PCs **free him**, he'll tell them that he's been running this train for five years with no incidents and it's the easiest job he's ever had, since the train pretty much runs itself and there's no passengers other than the occasional train hopper. And Rex mostly lets them ride anyway, since he knows what it feels like to be down on your luck.

Years back, he was approached by someone named F.B. Larkin, asking if he'd like to make a little money on the side. All he had to do was haul a little something extra on his route sometimes. Rex, being a man who believes that the uneven distribution of wealth in this country is akin to criminal, instantly said yes. He's transported four items so far—the ring being the fifth—and half the money he makes each time gets anonymously donated to someplace or someone he deems in need. (He keeps the rest for himself and his family. He's generous, but he's no saint.)

If he trusts or likes the PCs, he might ask them to retrieve the ring for him while he tries to help out anyone who's been injured. He knows that Elmira's been riding along for a while and he sensed that other people hopped on right before the accident, but he doesn't know who they are.

Alternatively, he might ask the PCs to deal with the Murmuration first, since he's deeply afraid of it and what it might do to the train.

If the PCs take the **ring of binding** for their own, Rex tries to convince them to let

him keep it (or, alternatively, to use it but bring it back to him) as he fears Larkin's wrath if he doesn't deliver it. If pressed, he might attack them with a makeshift weapon to try to get it back, but he's not a very good fighter.

Leads to: The Train Hopper: Elmira, Ma Boone's Boys, The Murmuration

GM intrusion: As the PCs work to free Rex, something cracks open inside the engine, sending a powerful stream of super-heated air out toward the characters.

THE TRAIN HOPPER: ELMIRA

Elmira is a young woman with short dark curly hair and a quick smile. Her clothing is a bit ragged and ill-fitting, but clean and well cared for. When the PCs arrive, she's at the edge of the hole, talking to the **roots** that are growing up over the train.

The PCs likely learn that Elmira's been traveling the rails for a long while, trying to track down her missing younger brother, Stanley. She heard a rumor that he was in Kilridge a few months back looking for work, so she had planned to hop off the train near there.

Elmira made a bargain with the Green to keep her safe while she travels to find her brother, but something seems to have gone wrong along the way. After she was attacked a day ago by another train hopper (she was able to defend herself and is fine), the Green seemed to become overzealous in its attempt to protect her. She needs to find a way to convince the roots that she's fine and that the Green can go back to being a guardian without aggressively attacking things that aren't actually dangers to her.

If she trusts or likes the PCs, she later might ask them to go to Kilridge with her (or to talk to Deen and the deputy sheriff) to see if her brother's there.

Leads to: The Roots, Kilridge, Deen and the Sheriff

MA BOONE'S BOYS

Colton, Cricket, and Otho aren't brothers, but they're family just the same. In fact, they even look alike with their dirty blond hair and their lanky frames covered in overalls. Raised by Ma Boone right up until they buried her last year, now they get by doing odd jobs around town, helping out at the

GM Tip: If you're new to GMing, this adventure might feel overwhelming for you. If that's the case, consider cutting out a few of the NPCs (maybe have only one of Ma Boone's boys or have Deen come without the deputy sheriff) to make it easier to keep track of what's going on.

Rex Anderson: level 2, sensing lies as level 4

Elmira: level 2; train hopping, the Green, and disguise as level 3; defense as level 5 (bargain with the Green); carries a pack with a week's worth of food, a compass, two books, a bedroll, and a railroad map

Roots, page 406

Freeing Rex: level 5

Ring of binding, page 407

Colton and Otho: level 3; carry crowbars and wire cutters. Colton has a large, bleeding gash on his leg, and Otho seems like he might have broken a rib. Both are hindered until they are healed.

Cricket: level 2; running, jumping, and train hopping as level 3; carries the ring of binding and a pocket knife

Freeing Colton and Otho: level 5

GM intrusion: As the PCs are helping Colton and Otho, the roots perceive one of the characters as a danger and start to attack.

Nadine "Deen" Bolling: level 3; positive social interactions, healing, and gardening as level 4; carries a giant purse (artifact) that seems to hold exactly what the situation needs.

Red dogs, page 372

Red dog pups: level 1

Finding the ring: level 4

Blue moon pie, page 316

Chicken feather brush, page 318

Scent hound, page 326

Crow baby, page 319

Tattered journal: Opening it without destroying the fragile pages is level 3. Most of the writing is about the red dogs—what they eat, how they reproduce, their bone structure, and so on. Reading the journal for ten minutes provides an asset in interacting with red dogs. The journal also includes the word MURMURATION on its back page.

Willy Armitta: level 3; intimidation, local geography, and railroads as level 4; carries a shotgun, a hunting knife, and a flashlight

Roots: level 6, defense tasks as level 4 due to speed and size; wrap foes in powerful roots and vines, holding them fast and then squeezing them. The roots can attempt to grab one new foe each round, but can have an unlimited number of foes already held and being squeezed. In each round that a caught foe doesn't escape, they suffer 6 points of damage.

Convincing the roots: level 6 persuasion task (such as trying to stop the attack or get the roots to remove themselves from the tunnel)

Characters who are skilled in the Green are eased in their tasks involving the roots.

GM intrusion: An object, weapon, or cypher falls into the hole.

local still, and trying to stay out of trouble.

The three boys hopped on the moving train at the edge of the tunnel, just as the spread of the Green opened the ground beneath the tracks. They were in the process of relieving one of the boxcars of its burden—namely, the ring of binding. Unfortunately, that boxcar, along with one of the coal gondolas, fell into the newly opened hole. It also took Colton and Otho, who are bruised and buried beneath the rubble, but still alive.

Cricket managed to avoid being caught in the ruckus. He grabbed the ring of binding and ran off into the Lorn with it.

If freed from the rubble, Colton and Otho likely ask the PCs to help save Cricket from the cursed tunnel. Of course, they also want to get the ring back so they can deliver it to Mister Stokely.

Leads to: The Lorn, Ring of Binding, The Roots

DEEN AND THE SHERIFF

Nadine "Deen" Bolling: With her olive complexion, pin-curled dark brown hair, and perfect outfit for any occasion, Deen might seem intimidating, except for her generous smile, curious nature, and giant purse full of whatever you might need. Currently, her purse has three cyphers: blue moon pie, chicken feather brush, and scent hound.

Willy Armitta: The former deputy sheriff really just wants to be retired, sit on his front porch, and listen to the world pass him by. But not even he can say no to Deen when she comes asking for something. He's not as young as he used to be, but his eyesight's

fine and he supposes his hand is steady enough. He has firsthand knowledge of railroads and is very familiar with the area.

These two NPCs arrive together after the PCs have arrived, and they offer to help in whatever way they can.

Leads to: Anywhere

THE LORN

When you ride the train through the Lorn, it looks like any old tunnel, hand-hammered out of the land with just enough room for the tracks to run through. But in fact, it's much larger and older than that. It was already a tunnel of sorts before the railroad came through, and those who worked to extend it often didn't live long enough after to tell tales of what they found there. This existing carved-out space is the work of the Murmuration.

If the PCs look for Cricket, they find him caught in a small cave-like room off the main tunnel, surrounded by a pack of three red dogs that appear to be protecting two small red dog pups.

It turns out that Cricket dropped the ring while running in here, and it's somewhere in the dark of the main tunnel.

In the corner of this room, there is also a chewed-up (but still usable) crow baby cypher and a very old and tattered journal.

THE ROOTS

In an attempt to protect Elmira and to reach the Murmuration, the roots and vines of the Green are starting to grow over the train, covering it with foliage. This is causing the train to be pulled further into the hole. The Green seems to be trying to reach its tendrils into the sky to attack the Murmuration while also ripping pieces off the train to use as weapons against anyone it deems a threat.

If the roots can be convinced that Elmira is safe, they stop their attack, stabilizing the train. They also assist Elmira and the PCs in attacking the Murmuration.

Leads to: The Murmuration, Ma Boone's Boys

DEEN'S PURSE (ARTIFACT)

Level: 5

Form: Large, butter-soft, light-brown leather purse with a brown silk lining and a zip top

Use: This purse can hold up to five cyphers with no ill effects on the user, as long as each item is no larger than a typical mason jar.

Come due: 1 in 1d20 (check each time a cypher is added to or removed from the purse)

THE MURMURATION

This amorphous being of the dark is what has given the Lorn its reputation for being cursed and dangerous, and rightly so. It resides throughout the vastness of the Lorn, wishing only to stay in the usual quiet and safety of its home. It abides the noise of the train, for it sees something of itself in the long black hiss of the machine, and it abides the creatures of darkness that reside beside it because it recognizes something of itself in them too.

But this green and living thing, this growing thing that has passed through it? That is not to be abided. Despite all the Murmuration's desires to stay in the dark, the feeling of the Green traveling through its home was enough to pull it into the light.

The **Murmuration** is a being made of small drops of darkness and shadow. It takes the shapes of many small things—rats, insects, birds, bats, and so on—that work together to form something amorphous and dangerous, like a tornado that throws or drops foes,

or vaguely mimic whatever it is fighting with, like a huge humanoid that stomps opponents.

The Murmuration is mostly focused on attacking the Green, but that's where the train and all of the people also are, and it doesn't care what else it might hurt in the process. If the Green is no longer in the Lorn, the Murmuration can be convinced to return to its home.

KILRIDGE

The PCs might have come from Kilridge or might head there after the adventure (or both).

Kilridge isn't the kind of place that was ever anything special, but it's even less so now. What there used to be—a little money from the mines and a little love from the railroad—is no more. What's left is people being kind to one another, as best they're able.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the PCs have accomplished whatever they set out to do, they'll be done with the adventure. There are any number of directions they can go from here.

- 🕒 **Rest and Relaxation:** After all their hard work, the PCs might be ready for a bit of a break. Deen likely invites everyone to return to town with her, promising to feed them a fantastic meal from her large garden.
- 🕒 **Back to Jimmie's Hell:** If one of the PCs' goals was to get the ring of binding and use it to bind the **Cindering**, they can head back to the town of Stonega and take care of that.
- 🕒 **Deliver the Ring to F.B. Larkin:** If the PCs don't take the ring for their own, they may decide to help Rex safely deliver it to F.B. Larkin. If they do, Rex gives them half of the \$100 he was promised (the amount he would have donated). They might make a powerful ally in F.B. Larkin and open themselves up to the opportunity for future jobs.

The Murmuration: level 5, resists poisons and disease as level 7; health 20; Armor 2; its many small pieces act as a single entity, swarming or storming all within immediate range for 5 points of damage

The Murmuration is not a creature of the Inner Dark, but is a powerful entity just the same.

GM intrusion: The Murmuration flings itself to the ground, attempting to crush everyone and everything beneath it.

The ring of binding can't be used on the Murmuration unless the PCs discover its name in some fashion, such as from the tattered journal.

The Cindering, page 400

RING OF BINDING (ARTIFACT)

Level: 7

Form: Matte black ring carved from burnt bone

Use: Wear the ring while saying the name of the creature that you wish to bind. The creature's level must be equal to or lower than the ring's level, and it must be within a mile of you during the time of binding.

This binds the creature for one year.

While a creature is bound, it is free to take any of its normal actions as long as it stays within a mile of where it was bound and doesn't inflict harm on any other living thing (including things like hunting for food, if that's something it normally does). During that year, if the creature leaves the area or hurts another living thing, it takes 7 points of damage every day and is hindered by two steps on all its actions until either it dies or the binding ends.

Binding the creature is an action.

Come Due: 1 in 1d6

F.B. Larkin: level 4, social interactions and business dealings as level 5

F.B. has promised Rex \$100 for the delivery of the ring of binding.

Mister Stokely: level 3, detects lies as level 5; Armor 2 (from a blood ward)

Blood Ward, page 37

You can place F.B. Larkin in any of the towns in the setting chapters. It's a great opportunity for the PCs to explore more of the setting.

F.B. Larkin is a short, curvy woman who dresses in men's suits and always wears a burgundy boater hat and carries a gold pocket watch. She knows everybody who's anybody and typically has multiple deals and business transactions going on at any given time.

- ☛ **Return to Mister Stokely:** Alternatively, the PCs might decide to help Ma Boone's boys get the ring to Mister Stokely, who remains in Kilridge.

Mister Stokely is a tall, gaunt man whose age seems indistinguishable. He dresses simply in dark pants and a light shirt, as well as a pair of diamond-patterned suspenders. He is offering \$25 for the ring,

but he's not above trying to take it from whoever has it if he senses that they're not planning to deliver it to him.

- ☛ **Elmira's Brother:** If the PCs wish to help Elmira track down her brother, Stanley, they'll probably head to the nearby town of Kilridge to help her follow up on her lead. Stanley was in town, but doesn't appear to be any longer. By asking around, they can discover that he left a few days ago, heading west on foot.
- ☛ **The Lorn:** The PCs may decide to further explore the Lorn, which has any number of beasts and beings, as well as treasures, inside its depths. This could be turned into a new adventure for the characters. And who knows where these long, winding tunnels might deposit the PCs once they're done?

EXPERIENCE POINT AWARDS

If the PCs accomplish any of the following, they each get 1 XP:

- Finding the ring of binding
- Rescuing all three of Ma Boone's boys
- Freeing Rex
- Helping Elmira deal with the roots and the Murmuration

These awards are in addition to any XP earned from GM intrusions.



BACK MATTER



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RESOURCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

Some of these suggestions are focused on Appalachia and its long and complex history, others focus on the magic and folklore of the region, and still others are more focused on the horror and supernatural slant of the podcast.

Of course, the best resource is the source material itself: the Old Gods of Appalachia podcast, which can be found here: www.oldgodsofappalachia.com

NONFICTION

Appalachian Curiosities, Laura Wright
Backwoods Witchcraft: Conjure & Folk Magic from Appalachia, Jake Richards and Starr Casas
Black Coal Miners in American, 1780–1980, Ronald Lewis
“Black Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia,” Steve Crowder, <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/149> (Electronic Theses and Dissertations)
Doctoring the Devil: Notebooks of an Appalachian Conjure Man, Jake Richards
Folkloric American Witchcraft and the Multicultural Experience: A Crucible at the Crossroads, Via Hedera
Growing Up Creeker: Class and Gender in Rural Appalachia, Linda DeRosier
Haunted Hills: Ghosts and Legends of Highlands and Cashiers, North Carolina, Stephanie Burt Williams
Ozark Folk Magic: Plants, Prayers & Healing, Brandon Weston
Ozark Magic and Folklore, Vance Randolph
Roots, Branches & Spirits: The Folkways & Witchery of Appalachia, H. Byron Ballard
The Walker Sisters: Spirited Women of the Smokies, Bonnie Trentham Myers
What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia, Elizabeth Catte
Wild Witchcraft: Folk Herbalism, Garden Magic, and Foraging for Spells, Rituals, and Remedies, Rebecca Beyer
Women of the Smokies, Courtney Lix

FICTION

Coffin Hollow and Other Ghost Tales, Ruth Ann Musick
The Evening Hour, Carter Sickels
Every Bone a Prayer, Ashley Blooms
Harrow County, Cullen Bunn and Tyler Crook (comic)
Hellboy: The Crooked Man and Others, Mike Mignola (comic)
Hillbilly, Eric Powell (comic)
Southern Gods, John Hornor Jacobs
Summer Sons, Lee Mandelo
Those Who Went Remain There Still, Cherie Priest
The Tufa Novels, Alex Bledsoe (series)
The Twisted Ones, T. Kingfisher
Vile Affections, Caitlin R. Kiernan

POEMS AND ESSAYS

Acolytes, Nikki Giovanni (poetry and essays)
Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place, bell hooks (poetry)
Black Bone: 25 Years of the Affrilachian Poets, edited by Bianca Lynne Spriggs and Jeremy Paden (poetry)

MOVIES

The Descent (2005)
The Mothman Prophecies (2002)
October Sky (1999)
Spell (2020)

MUSIC AND AUDIO

Blood on the Harp
The Brothers Bright
Gravesend Weavers
Rising Appalachia
River Whyless
Those Poor Bastards

Audio clips and music designed specifically for this game can be found at:

mymcg.info/theoldgodsspeak

mymcg.info/songsofbloodanddarkness

Feel free to use them to add atmosphere and sound to your game.

Old Gods of Appalachia is a horror setting and thus contains harrowing and scary elements that are inherent to gameplay. If going through this form makes you realize horror settings aren't for you, it's okay to step away and play a different type of game.

GM Name: _____

Player Name: (or leave blank) _____

Planned Game Theme: _____

If this game were a movie, its movie rating would be: G PG PG-13 R NC-17 Other: _____

Mark the color that best illustrates your comfort level with the following plot or story elements.

☐ **Green** = Enthusiastic consent; bring it on!

☐ **Yellow** = Okay if veiled or offstage; might be okay onstage but requires discussion ahead of time; uncertain.

☐ **Red** = Hard line; do not include.

HORROR	<input type="checkbox"/> G	<input type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> R
Animal endangerment.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Body horror	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child endangerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Demonic possession	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dismemberment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eyeballs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gore	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mind control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mines/underground scenarios	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mutilation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Situations involving literal darkness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Snakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spiders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Witchcraft.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILY	<input type="checkbox"/> G	<input type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> R
Romance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fade to black	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Explicit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Between PCs and NPCs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Between PCs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fade to Black	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Explicit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Between PCs and NPCs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Between PCs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Between my PC and another PC/NPC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Abandonment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Death of a caretaker/parent.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Death of a child.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Death of a spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES...	<input type="checkbox"/> G	<input type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> R
Bullying.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gun violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homophobia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kidnapping.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racism.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Real-world religion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slavery.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transphobia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other cultural issues.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH	<input type="checkbox"/> G	<input type="checkbox"/> Y	<input type="checkbox"/> R
Abortion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cancer.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Claustrophobia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gaslighting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Genocide.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hanging/strangulation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Miscarriage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Natural disasters.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paralysis/physical restraint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police, police aggression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self-harm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Severe weather	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual assault	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Starvation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Suicide.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Terrorism.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thirst.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Torture (physical).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Torture (psychological).....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you want the GM to follow up with you to clarify any of these responses? If so, which ones?

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BACKGROUND

NOTES

PORTRAIT

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